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ABSTRACT

Designed to assist providers of community-based employment training programs in the assessment of their efforts, this manual provides a conceptual framework and practical advice for planning and carrying out locally directed evaluations. After section I explains the purpose of the manual, section II presents a planning guide that establishes certain assumptions about community-based programs, and offers recommendations concerning the creation of an evaluation team, the establishment of the purpose of the evaluation, data collection and analysis, and management. Section III explains basic research and data collection methods, covering the use of questionnaires, rating scales, interviews, observations, tests, logs, program records, trainee feedback, and staff discussion. Section IV contains practical suggestions for analyzing and interpreting quantitative and qualitative evaluation data. Each of 10 appendixes covers a specific feature common to many community-based training programs, including entry criteria and processes, course content, instruction, learning styles, work placements, trainee performance, access to services, completion outcomes, follow-up studies, and program administration. (AJL)

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George Brown

The City College

COMMUNITY OUTREACH DEPARTMENT

EVALUATION MANUAL FOR COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMS

PREPARED BY
STEPHEN E. ANDERSON

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PREFACE

This resource manual is an evaluation tool to assist providers of community-based training programs with evaluation of their programs. It was developed by the Community Outreach Department of George Brown College with funding from the ONTARIO MINISTRY OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, Special Projects Funds.

The manual provides conceptual frameworks and practical advice for planning and carrying out locally-directed evaluations, taking into account the specific characteristics of these types of programs.

Sections I - IV present suggestions for program evaluation planning, for development and use of evaluation tools (questionnaires, interviews), and for interpreting evaluation findings. Section V is a series of appendices focussing on specific evaluation topics common to many community-based training programs (participant entry, course content, work placements, follow-up studies). Worksheets and tables to aid in program evaluation planning are included in the text.

This manual does not necessarily represent the views of the Ontario Ministry of Skills Development.

To obtain a copy of the manual, please contact the Community Outreach Department, George Brown College, P.O. Box 1015, Station B, Toronto, Ontario M5T 2T9,
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to administrators of the Ontario Ministry of Skills Development Special Projects Funds for their interest in and financial support for this manual.

The manual was prepared with input from community agency and College administrators and teachers involved in community-based training programs affiliated with George Brown College. Their contributions in interviews, workshop discussions, local evaluation instruments and reports are gratefully acknowledged.

A draft of the manual was critiqued by selected reviewers from George Brown College, community agencies, government, and by external experts in evaluation of adult training programs. Many of their suggestions were incorporated into the final document. The reviewers are listed at the end of these acknowledgements.

I wish to extend a personal thanks to Terry Dance for her guidance, confidence, support and suggestions during the production of this manual. My thanks to Ms. Dance and to Bob Gwilliam for giving me the opportunity to work on this project. Thanks are due to Grizelia Schanderl and Mehri Dara for assisting with the logistics of producing the manual and arranging workshops associated with its development. I am also greatful to Luc Landry and Ella McCullough for their timely assistance with word processing.

Stephen E. Anderson
October, 1987

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USER'S GUIDE

USE THIS MANUAL AS A REFERENCE BOOK FOR PLANNING AND CARRYING OUT PROGRAM EVALUATIONS.

THE MANUAL CONTAINS GUIDELINES, SUGGESTIONS AND WORKSHEETS TO HELP YOU WITH THE FOLLOWING USES:

- DEVELOPING A PROGRAM EVALUATION PLAN (SECTION II)
- DEVELOPING EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS (SECTION III)
- ANALYZING PROGRAM EVALUATION DATA (SECTION IV)
- DESIGNING EVALUATIONS OF SPECIFIC PROGRAM FEATURES (COURSE CONTENT, INSTRUCTION, WORK PLACEMENTS, ETC. -- APPENDICES)
- TEACHING PROGRAM STAFF ABOUT PROGRAM EVALUATION THEORY AND METHODS
- NEGOTIATING TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

SAMPLE WORKSHEETS ATTACHED AT THE END OF EACH SECTION CAN BE REMOVED AND COPIED TO HELP YOU CARRY OUT PROGRAM EVALUATION TASKS.

THE FOLLOWING FEATURES OF THE MANUAL WILL HELP YOU LOCATE THE INFORMATION YOU WANT WHEN YOU WANT IT.

- OVERALL TABLE OF CONTENTS
- LIST OF WORKSHEETS AND TABLES
- COLOR CODED MAJOR SECTIONS
- LABELED DIVIDERS FOR EACH SECTION
- MINI-CONTENTS LIST AT START OF EACH SECTION

SECTION I: PURPOSE OF THE MANUAL

I.A PURPOSE

I.B USERS

I.C USES

I.D ORGANIZATION OF THE MANUAL

I.E DEVELOPMENT OF THE MANUAL

I.F COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMS

I.G THE NEED FOR THE MANUAL

SECTION I: PURPOSE OF THE MANUAL

I.A PURPOSE

This manual is designed to assist community-based training program administrators and staff with the evaluation of their programs for the purpose of program improvement. The manual provides practical guidance in designing and carrying out evaluations of the programs as a whole, and of specific components commonly associated with these kinds of programs (e.g., course content, instruction, work experience, followup studies).

I.B USERS

The program evaluation manual is intended for use by community-based training program administrators and staff. This includes program administrators, instructors, placement coordinators, and counselors from the sponsoring community organization. It also includes administrators and staff from community colleges, school boards or other partners in program delivery.

Where community colleges are involved as partners in community based training programs, this manual will be of most use to administrators such as academic division chairpersons and program coordinators.

A collaborative approach to program evaluation is advocated throughout the manual. In joint programs each training partner is responsible for different areas of program operations. Neither has the unilateral authority to evaluate the other's performance and to carry out recommendations affecting the other's sphere of operations. Each is subject to its own organizational traditions and constraints. Useful evaluation of jointly sponsored community-based training programs depends on collaboration between community agencies and their training partners.

The manual also advocates collaboration in program evaluation among the key participants in community-based training programs: program administrators, staff (e.g., teachers, counselors, placement coordinators), trainees, and employers. It should also include advisory boards or boards of directors where they have an important say in program management and change.

I.C USES

This is a resource manual for planning and carrying out locally directed evaluations of community-based training programs. It is designed both to teach you about program evaluation and to help you carry out program evaluationS.

It provides guidelines, suggestions and worksheets to assist you with the following uses:

- **DEVELOPING AN OVERALL PROGRAM EVALUATION PLAN**
- **DEVELOPING EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS (QUESTIONNAIRES, INTERVIEWS, TESTS, ETC.)**
- **ANALYZING PROGRAM EVALUATION DATA**
- **DESIGNING EVALUATIONS OF SPECIFIC PROGRAM FEATURES (COURSE CONTENT, INSTRUCTION, WORK PLACEMENTS, ETC.)**
- **NEGOTIATING TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION**
- **TEACHING PROGRAM STAFF ABOUT PROGRAM EVALUATION, THEORY AND METHODS**

The manual can be read from cover to cover as a methodology text on the evaluation of community-based training programs. To facilitate its use in practice, however, it has been designed as a **REFERENCE BOOK** on evaluation.

Each section can be consulted independently, depending on your particular needs and interests. Point form guidelines and worksheets for easy reference are included at the end of each section. The worksheets can be removed and duplicated as needed.

I.D ORGANIZATION OF THE MANUAL

The evaluation manual begins with this overview of the purpose of the manual. The remainder of the document is organized in four major sections.

Section II presents a Program Evaluation Planning Guide divided into 7 subsections, as follows:

- II.A **INTRODUCTION** (overview of section)
- II.B **ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS** (size, resources, clients, etc.)
- II.C **ORIENTATION TO PROGRAM EVALUATION** (evaluation model for evaluating community-based training)
- II.D **ORGANIZING AN EVALUATION TEAM**
- II.E **FOCUSSING THE EVALUATION PURPOSE** (purpose, scope, questions)
- II.F **PLANNING INFORMATION COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING**
- II.G **MANAGING EVALUATION ACTIVITIES**

Planning guidelines, worksheets, and suggested procedures are included in Sections II.D, II.E and II.F.

Section III deals with methods for information collection and analysis. The focus is on basic research methods for program evaluation, not on particular types of evaluation studies (see the Appendices). The methods covered are typical of those used in community based training programs. Section III includes:

- III.A **INTRODUCTION** (overview of section)
- III.B **QUESTIONNAIRES AND RATINGS**
- III.C **INTERVIEWS**
- III.D **OBSERVATIONS**
- III.E **TESTS**
- III.F **LOGS**

III.G **PROGRAM RECORDS**

III.H **TRAINEE FEEDBACK**

III.I **STAFF DISCUSSION**

The recommendations are not highly technical and not dependent on resources beyond the reach of most community based training programs. The purpose of Section III is to suggest ways of improving existing evaluation practices.

Section IV contains practical suggestions for analyzing and interpreting quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (words) evaluation data. Section IV includes:

IV.A	**INTRODUCTION** (a strategy for increasing the accuracy of findings & conclusions)
IV.B	**WORKING WITH NUMBERS** (analyzing and reporting numerical information)
IV.C	**WORKING WITH WORDS** (analyzing and reporting narrative information)
IV.D	**CHECKING CONCLUSIONS** (techniques for verifying findings)
IV.E	**MAKING JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS** (evaluation standards, report formats)

There are 9 **APPENDICES (SECTION V)**. Each Appendix covers a specific program feature common to many community based training programs. The Appendices include:

V.A **ENTRY CRITERIA AND PROCESS**

V.B **COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS**

V.C **INSTRUCTION**

V.D **LEARNING STYLES**

V.E **WORK PLACEMENTS**

V.F **TRAINEE PERFORMANCE**

V.G **ACCESS TO SERVICES**

V.H COMPLETION OUTCOMES

V.I FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

V.J PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Each Appendix contains four parts: (1) general considerations; (2) methods and standards; and (3) things to look at.

I.E DEVELOPMENT OF THE MANUAL

The evaluation manual was developed by an evaluation consultant working with the Community Outreach Department of George Brown College, Toronto, Ontario. Input was obtained from community-based programs affiliated with the College. The main steps in its development were:

1) Survey of related evaluation manuals and literature.

2) Visits to 8 community-based training programs in Metropolitan Toronto to determine their organizational and programmatic features, current program evaluation practices, and needs for evaluation assistance. Sample selected to get variation in program focus (e.g., automated office procedures, non-traditional occupations for women, community services, bridging), client type (re-entry women, immigrants, native women, unemployed adults), affiliation arrangements (e.g., use/non-use of George Brown instructors), and experience with program evaluation. Program visits included interviews with staff from the sponsoring community agencies and from George Brown College. Evaluation reports and tools were collected from each program.

3) Presentation and discussion of an outline for the evaluation manual at a workshop organized for community-based programs associated with George Brown College. 24 community-based programs were represented.

4) Production of a draft evaluation manual.

5) Review and critique of draft manual by selected individuals from community-based programs, George

Brown College, and government (Employment and Immigration Canada, Ontario Ministry of Skills Development, Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities), and by experts in the evaluation of human services programs.

7) Production and dissemination of final manual.

I.F COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMS

The manual is designed for use with community-based training programs. The programs are "community based" because the primary sponsors are mainly non-profit community agencies and many of the programs' services are delivered in non-traditional educational settings to disadvantaged adults and youth within the communities they serve.

Institutions such as community colleges and school boards often participate as partners in these programs, providing instructional services, access to learning materials and equipment, certificates, and so on, but they remain community-based as defined above.

The term "training" is used broadly to cover a wide variety of employment preparation programs for employment disadvantaged adults. These include bridging programs that prepare participants with the basic educational and life skills they need to become employable or seek further education, as well as those that prepare people for immediate employment in a specific occupation or field.

While community-based training programs are not a new phenomenon in Ontario and Canada, the number and visibility of these non-traditional educational programs have been given a boost in recent years in response to government training initiatives at the federal (e.g. Canadian Jobs Strategy) and provincial (e.g. Ontario Basic Skills Program) levels.

A number of reports testify to the vitality of the community-based training movement in Ontario (see Section I references). A 1985 study commissioned by The Association of Community Based Training and Education for Women (ACTEW) lists 24 community-based training programs for women just in Metropolitan Toronto. These programs graduate approximately 2700 women annually.

George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology established a Community Outreach Department in 1985 to promote the affiliation of community-based training programs with the College. The number of affiliated programs grew from 5 to 31 in the first year, and more than 100 inquiries about possible joint training programs were processed. Approximately 1500 full or part time students were enrolled in these programs.

Participants in the community-based programs described in these reports are typically unemployed, on some form of social assistance, and have less than a grade 12 education. A majority are women, and many are single mothers. In addition, many are recent immigrants in need of academic upgrading, Canadian work experience, and extra help in learning English for the workplace.

The sponsors and developers of this program evaluation manual believe that community-based training can be a very effective means of preparing employment disadvantaged adults to get jobs or to further their education. The manual has been developed in the spirit of assisting the deliverers of these programs in their ongoing efforts to make them better.

I.G THE NEED FOR THE MANUAL

This manual advocates the use of locally-directed program evaluation as a tool for improving and maintaining the effectiveness of community-based training programs. The need for locally-directed evaluation, and for resource materials such as this manual, is based on two fundamental concerns -- **program quality** and **program survival**.

The concern for **program quality** relates to several issues. First is that the participants in these programs are unlikely to derive much benefit from poorly designed and executed programs. The use of sound program evaluation practices can make community-based programs capable of achieving better results for their clients.

Second is that community agency staff members are typically subject to accountability requirements, including evidence of program evaluation, from government funders, advisory boards, parent agencies, etc. Program evaluation expertise is not part of the normal academic preparation of most community agency staff. It is more likely to be acquired through persistent reflective effort on-the-job, through participation in evaluation workshops, by consulting respected peers, and by referring to manuals. This manual addresses the need of many staff of community-based training programs for additional help in carrying out useful program evaluation.

Most sourcebooks on evaluation methods are quite general in organizational and program focus (see bibliography). This manual is designed specifically to take into account the organizational and programmatic characteristics of small community-based training programs.

Another reason for interest in the quality of community-based training programs is that the organizational base for this type of training is expanding. One effect of the Canadian Jobs Strategy has been to decentralize funding and responsibility for training away from the community colleges and into the private sector and community agencies.

Community colleges, such as George Brown College, responded by supporting affiliation arrangements with many community-based programs. These joint programs are innovative ventures for both the colleges and the community agencies, and there is a clear need for careful evaluation of the new program structures, processes and results. The traditional mechanisms for quality control of employment training offered through the colleges or agencies are not easily applied to these joint programs.

The second major concern underlying the development of this manual is **program survival**. Stable public funding for community-based training is uncertain. Future funding for these programs depends partly on their ability to provide believable evidence of program outcomes. The prospects for good results depend on their ability to engage in serious ongoing efforts at program improvement.

Program evaluation is a means of generating information to assist in program improvement, and a way to document program outcomes relevant to funding sources. Political decisions to cut funding for human services programs need to be based on solid evidence of actual program effects. Staff of community-based training programs who can produce reliable information about actual client outcomes are in the best position to argue for future funding.

Program evaluation is a practical way for program personnel to learn how well their programs are working, to identify needs for program improvement, and to satisfy needs for public accountability.

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1. Dance, Terry. "College/Community Partnership: An Approach to Life-Long Learning". Community Outreach Department, George Brown College. Submission to Association of Canadian Community Colleges Making Canada Productive Spotlight Award. December, 1986.

2. Livingstone, Cathy and Richardson, Karen. "The Needs of Community-Based Training Programs for Women in Metro Toronto: Some Recommendations". Submitted to The Association of Community-Based Training and Education for Women (ACTEW). December 1985.

SECTION II: PROGRAM EVALUATION PLANNING GUIDE

II.A INTRODUCTION

II.B ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

- ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
- PROGRAMMATIC CHARACTERISTICS

II.C ORIENTATION TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

II.D ORGANIZING AN EVALUATION TEAM

II.E FOCUSSING THE EVALUATION PURPOSE

- PROGRAM EVALUATION PURPOSES
- PROGRAM EVALUATION FOCUS

II.F PLANNING FOR INFORMATION COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

- EVALUATION DESIGN
- SAMPLE SELECTION
- WHEN TO EVALUATE
- SCHEDULING EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

II.G MANAGING EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

SECTION II:A INTRODUCTION

CONTENTS OF THE PLANNING GUIDE

USE OF THE PLANNING GUIDE

II.A INTRODUCTION

Contents of the Planning Guide

Section II presents a program evaluation planning guide divided into 6 subsections.

II.B ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

II.C ORIENTATION TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

II.D ORGANIZING AN EVALUATION TEAM

II.E FOCUSSING THE EVALUATION PURPOSE

II.F PLANNING FOR INFORMATION COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

II.G MANAGING EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Section II.B describes key characteristics of community-based training programs which need to be taken into account in designing program evaluations (e.g., size, resources, philosophies, organization).

Section II.C outlines the basic orientation and approach to program evaluation advocated in this manual.
Sections II.D - II.F deal with the basic steps in planning an evaluation study: organizing a team, focussing the evaluation, data collection, data interpretation and managing evaluation activities.

Each task related section includes general guidelines, worksheets and procedures for completing the task.

Use of the Planning Guide

The planning guide is intended to provide a hands-on system for planning the evaluation of a community based training program. You can use it either for planning an overall evaluation of the program or for planning evaluations of specific program components.

The planning guide can be used with existing and new programs. Existing programs are likely to have a number of evaluation strategies and procedures already in place. Evaluations of different parts of a program, however, are often carried out independently of one another. There is seldom an overall plan for program evaluation.

Use this planning guide to map what parts of an existing program are being evaluated and how. This will provide a framework for integrating current evaluation practices into an overall strategy for program evaluation, and for identifying weaknesses and strengths in current evaluation practices.

The planning guide will be of particular use in the pilot stages of program development. It will help you identify the most critical needs for evaluating a beginning program. Within the framework of the initial plan, decisions to revise or expand the evaluation system during future program cycles can be made.

II.B ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

PROGRAMMATIC CHARACTERISTICS

II.B ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

Section II.B lays out some assumptions about community-based training programs which need to be considered in carrying out locally-directed program evaluations. The recommendations presented in the manual are grounded in these assumptions.

One set of assumptions focusses on organizational characteristics. The other set focusses on programmatic features. While all the characteristics listed are not found in all community-based training programs, they are sufficiently common to serve as a basis for a general guide to evaluating community-based training programs.

Readers with little interest in this discussion can refer to Tables 1 and 2 for a summary of the characteristics and their implications for evaluating community-based training programs.

Organizational Characteristics

The key organizational characteristics of community- based training programs have to do with the following:

- **LOCATION**
- **SIZE**
- **AUTONOMY**
- **INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL LINKAGES**
- **FUNDING**
- **HUMAN RESOURCES**
- **MATERIAL RESOURCES**
- **MANAGEMENT**

LOCATION

Community agencies are the primary sponsors for delivering these programs. While the sponsoring agencies may enter into training partnerships with traditional institutions, such as community colleges and school boards, the programs are rooted in the communities they serve.

These communities may be defined by a geographic area and/or by specific client characteristics (e.g., unemployed women, ethnic group, disability, immigrant status). The community agency provides a link between clients and training services which otherwise would not exist. Program evaluation must recognize and respect the significance of program location.

This means that the community agency must play a major role in deciding what and how to evaluate the program. It means that the needs of the client group can not be ignored in choosing standards for program success.

It means paying attention to the characteristics and impact of the learning milieu on trainee participation and outcomes. The goal of creating a non-threatening, accessible and supportive setting is a key feature of many community-based training programs. That in itself can be an important focus of evaluation.

It means taking into account where program services are actually being delivered. When various training partners are involved, different parts of community-based training programs may be delivered at different sites -- a community setting, a college campus, a host employer's workplace. An evaluation of the program has to sample the experience and effects of the program wherever its services are delivered.

TABLE 1. ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EVALUATION

ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	EVALUATION IMPLICATIONS
Program Location	
- community-based	- community agency major role in evaluation - client needs focus - learning context focus
- multiple training sites	- multi-site evaluation
Size	
- community agencies smaller than training institutions	- agency/program size limits evaluation resources
- variation in community agency size	
- small training groups	- program size affects choice of methods
Autonomy	
- autonomous community agencies	- agencies keep ownership of program - evaluation done with, not to agency
Inter-organizational Linkages	
- joint programs w/ training partners	- no unilateral control over evaluation - mutual respect of rights, interests & constraints
- varied affiliation arrangements	- training partners cooperate in evaluation - evaluation of training partner linkages
Funding	
- non-profit community agencies	- little agency money for evaluation
- dependency on external funding	- program funding for evaluation uncertain - accountability requirements
- uncertain continuation of funding	- staff turnover - evaluation management by parent agency - survival focus

Human Resources: Program Managers	
- agency-based program manager - agency program manager multiple duties	- agency program managers have little time for evaluation
- training partner administrators responsible for other programs	- training partner administrators have little time for evaluation
Human Resources: Program Staff	
- many kinds of staff - staff w/ multiple training duties - staff from different training partners - staff dispersed	- difficult to organize staff participation in evaluation
- full/part-time staff	- part-time staff little time/incentives for evaluation role
- contract staff	- specify evaluation role job description
- may use non-certified instructors	- check staff qualifications for training
- not professional researchers	- use simple practical research methods
Material Resources	
- agency & training partners can afford material resources for evaluation	- technical skills are bigger obstacle than material resources
Program Management	
- agencies avoid hierarchical authoritarian management	- top down program evaluation doesn't fit
- agencies prefer collective consensus management	- participatory program evaluation approach preferred
- client-centred & flexible	- program adapts to client needs - evaluation criteria adapted to clients - clients evaluate the programs
- agency boards (advisory, directors)	- involve boards in program evaluation

TABLE 2. PROGRAMMATIC CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EVALUATION

PROGRAMMATIC CHARACTERISTICS	**EVALUATION IMPLICATIONS**
Multicomponent programs (technical training, on-the job training, academic upgrading, ESL, life skills, etc.)	Evaluation considers all program components
Multiple program goals (job placement & retention, increased income, further education, self-confidence, etc.)	Evaluation considers all program goals
Specific client groups	Client characteristics a necessary focus
Clients often atypical (compared to students in traditional training institutions)	Trainee performance standards, curriculum, and teaching adapted to client characteristics
Flexible entry requirements (many w/ continous entry policies)	Evaluation accomodates heterogeneous trainee backgrounds
Client support services to access training (training allowances, day care, counseling, etc.)	Evaluation responsive to access problems Support services periodically evaluated
Performance & competency based training	Measurement of trainee performance on terminal objectives
Self-directed learning approaches	Individualized trainee evaluation Aggregation of individualized assessments for program evaluation
Client-centred	Let clients evaluate the program Client input sought during & end of program

SIZE

Size is another key organizational feature. When compared to institutions such as community colleges and school boards, the local agencies that deliver community based-training are not large.

Among themselves, community agencies also differ in size, ranging from fairly large (e.g., YWCA, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Metropolitan Housing Authority), to medium (e.g., multi-service community centres), to small (e.g., a job placement centre for immigrant women, a store front training centre for Native women).

Regardless of the sponsoring agency's size, the programs tend to be small. The number of trainees typically ranges from 15 to 50.

Resources (money, staff, time, materials) for program evaluation are likely to diminish in proportion to agency and program size. Program size can also affect the choice of methods for program evaluation. Complicated statistics, for example, would be out of place in analyzing and reporting the placement outcomes of a program serving 15 trainees. The feasibility of using qualitative methods, such as interviews, participant logs and case studies is greater for small programs.

AUTONOMY

The community agencies sponsoring community-based training programs are usually autonomous organizations. Even when training partners such as community colleges and school boards are involved, ownership of the programs rests with the community agencies. This means that program evaluations are not something that can be done to them so much as with them.

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL LINKAGES

Community-based training programs are often **joint projects**. A community agency might arrange with a community college to provide technical training, such as computer aided drafting or commercial ceramics. The agency itself might provide life skills training, academic upgrading, on-the-job training, and job search assistance. Neither partner has unilateral control over what gets evaluated and how. Each will have certain rights, interests, and constraints (e.g., union contracts). Community colleges, for example, will want to approve curricula developed by a community agency before agreeing to certify the program. Community agencies may insist on their right to evaluate the teaching of college instructors seconded to their training programs.

For jointly sponsored programs, all major training partners need to cooperate in planning and carrying out program evaluation. The inter-organizational arrangements themselves can be evaluated.

FUNDING

Community-based training programs are usually non-profit operations. The sponsoring agencies are likely to depend on voluntary and public funding (e.g., The United Way, Municipal, Provincial and Federal governments) for their basic operating costs. The training programs themselves are usually funded through grants from Federal or Provincial government ministries.

There are several implications for program evaluation. At the agency level there is not likely to be much money available for evaluation of specific programs. At the program level a budget for program evaluation may not be built into the funding criteria and formulas. Community-based training programs cannot be expected to have much extra money to put into program evaluation.

The dependency of community-based training programs on external funding implies accountability to the funding source. Funders may require sponsoring agencies to provide information such as client characteristics, training costs, completion and placement rates.

Evaluations of community-based training programs should not be limited to the information requirements of funders. The needs of program staff for information to guide program improvement are usually quite different.

The reliance on external funding has two further implications for program evaluation. Program managers and staff may not be interested or available to complete an evaluation of a program that is discontinued. This is especially so for contractually appointed program personnel. When continuation is uncertain, management of a program evaluation may need to be stepped up from the program to the agency level.

Program survival becomes an important purpose for doing program evaluation. Evidence to document how well the program is accomplishing its goals, and what it is doing to improve its success is vital to renewed funding.

HUMAN RESOURCES: PROGRAM MANAGERS

Because they are small, community-based training programs do not have many human resources to draw on.
They rarely have more than one front line administrator in the agency setting. This person is often responsible for more than one program. Sometimes the agency program manager wears many hats. He or she might provide counselling, arrange job placements, or teach life skills, in addition to performing administrative responsibilities. Agency program managers know the value of program evaluation, but evaluation cannot demand an unreasonable amount of their time.

The same holds for administrators in training partner organizations. A community college program administrator may provide curriculum and instructional services to several community-based programs, in addition to the regular programs on campus. These people need to be involved, but cannot devote great amounts of time to evaluating a single program.

HUMAN RESOURCES: STAFF

Small as they are, the delivery of community-based training programs often involves a lot of staff. They can include technical trainers, academic instructors (upgrading, ESL), life skills coaches, vocational/personal counselors, and work placement coordinators. Some staff members may perform more than one function.

Getting all the staff together at the same time can be a difficult feat. This is especially so when the staff's participation is only part-time, and when the staff members are responsible to different training partners.

A design for evaluating community-based training programs has to involve staff in planning and carrying out the evaluation. This is a major practical challenge to program administrators.

Whether they are administrators or teachers, from a community agency or a training institution, the people responsible for delivering community-based training programs do not usually have highly technical research skills. Models for local evaluation of these programs should not be dependent on the use of complicated research methods. The need is for practicality and believability, not methodological purity.

MATERIAL RESOURCES

Local evaluations of community-based training programs do not require much in the way of material resources. Writing materials, word processors or typewriters, casette recorders, filing supplies, and the like are not beyond the reach of these programs. If program staff want to do computerized data processing, today's microcomputers and software have that capability. Most community-based training agencies have micro-computers, and statistical software for micro-computers is not hard to get.

Material resources should not be a major stumbling block to local program evaluation. The real question is whether people have the technical expertise to use the technologies available to their full potential.

MANAGEMENT

Community agencies are not usually top-heavy, authoritarian, and rigid when it comes to program management. Hierarchical organization, order giving, and communication through a chain-of-command is not typical, particularly among smaller agencies and those run by women. Program staff are likely to make program decisions as a team by consultation, group discussion, consensus and/or vote. Open informal communication between administrators and staff is common.

Top down models of program evaluation based on management control do not fit with the management style of most community-based training programs. Participatory approaches are preferred.

The management of community-based training programs also tends to be client-centred and flexible. This means that assessment of client needs and interventions to meet those needs are important program goals. It means that a program has to adapt what it delivers and its criteria for "success" to the needs of each training group. And it means that program participants should have a voice in evaluating the program.

A final characteristic of the management of community-based programs is that they are usually responsible to an agency board of directors or advisory committee. Communication with these groups about program evaluation plans and results is essential.

Programmatic Characteristics

Community-based training programs vary widely in their specific purposes, occupational focus, and client groups. Even so, there are some basic features common to many programs. Here we present the following **key programmatic assumptions and their implications for program evaluation** (see summary, Table 2):

- **MULTICOMPONENT PROGRAMS**
- **MULTIPLE GOALS**
- **SPECIFIC CLIENT GROUPS**
- **ATYPICAL CLIENT GROUPS**
- **FLEXIBLE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS**
- **SUPPORT TO ACCESS TRAINING**
- **PERFORMANCE & COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING**
- **SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING APPROACHES**
- **CLIENT-CENTRED**

MULTICOMPONENT PROGRAMS

Community-based training programs are usually described as holistic and integrated. This means that they attempt to do more than deliver technical skills training for a specific job. They attempt to deal with the total educational and support needs of trainees. The programs are multicomponent.

A complete program might include technical instruction, on-the-job training, academic upgrading, English as a Second Language, life skills training, job search and placement help, career and personal counseling. A program evaluation should consider all program components. The program has to have a way of assessing trainee performance across the program as a whole.

MULTIPLE GOALS

Funders of occupational training programs often have one basic outcome in mind. Did the participants get and keep a job as a result of their training? Local program sponsors, however, usually have multiple program goals.

In addition to job placement, they actively consider job retention, increased earnings, whether trainees go on to further training or education, increased self confidence and economic independence. Local program evaluations must consider all program goals.

SPECIFIC CLIENT GROUPS

Institutionally-based training programs are usually open to anyone who can satisfy the entry requirements. Community-based training programs serve specific client populations. This means that participant characteristics are an important focus of ongoing evaluation. Are the people the program is intended to help being reached?

ATYPICAL CLIENT GROUPS

Community-based training program clients are in many cases atypical of students served by traditional training institutions such as community colleges.

In one way or another participants in community-based training are employment disadvantaged. Disadvantages may include lack of basic education and credentials, work experience, technical skills, job search skills, self confidence, child support services, English language proficiency, and money to live on while going through training. Many community-based training program are intended to help women gain access to occupational fields traditionally dominated by men (e.g., construction, electronics).

From an evaluation standpoint, trainee performance standards may have to be adapted to the specific client population.

Because participants in community-based training programs differ in the ways described above, conventional curriculum materials and teaching methods may not work best. Standards for assessing the quality of curriculum and instruction need to take client learning styles into account.

FLEXIBLE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Training institutions such as community colleges maintain relatively stringent program entry requirements. Programs are open to anyone who can meet the pre-requisites, and students all begin and complete the program at the same time. As a result, students in a program are fairly homogeneous in their knowledge and skills.

Community-based training programs differ. They maintain relatively flexible entry requirements, and many use a modified continous intake system. This means that the knowledge and skill levels of trainees are likely to be quite heterogeneous. Evaluation of these programs has to accomodate wide variation in participant entry points.

ACCESS SUPPORT SERVICES

Community-based programs help participants deal with problems of access to training. The programs include support services such as training and transportation allowances, and counselling to help trainees deal with child care arrangements, housing and family problems.

Evaluations of community-based training programs should recognize the effects of access problems on participant outcomes.

Support services to assist with access to training can be periodically evaluated. Does the program succeed in helping trainees deal with factors hindering their access to the program?

PERFORMANCE & COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING

While training objectives may differ from programs in traditional training institutions, community-based programs are performance and competency based. Participants are trained for entry into occupational fields with specific skill requirements, or they are expected to attain specific academic levels. Even for training in life skills and job search techniques, program developers state specific behavioral expectations. Evaluations of these programs have to incorporate performance objectives and measures.

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING APPROACHES

Because of their flexible entry policies, community-based training programs often use self-directed learning approaches.

This implies procedures for individualized assessment of trainee performance. There will still be a need for group measures of trainee performance across the program.

CLIENT-CENTRED

Community-based programs are client-centred. Community agency sponsors are highly supportive of participant involvement in program evaluation. Evaluation must include ways for trainees to assess program content, training and services. Feedback from trainees should be solicited during as well as at the end of the program.

II.C ORIENTATION TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

DEFINITION OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAM EVALUATION APPROACH

LIMITATIONS TO THE APPROACH

II.C ORIENTATION TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

Definition of Program Evaluation

Section II.C describes **an approach to program evaluation based on the organizational and programmatic features of community-based training programs**.

The approach presented in this manual is less a set of procedures than a strategic framework for planning the evaluation of a community-based training program. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to it as a "community-based training approach to program evaluation". The name places the emphasis on the type of program the evaluation approach is intended to serve. The community-based training evaluation approach is defined simply as follows:

> **The systematic collection and use of information by program staff to clarify and make decisions about program characteristics, activities and effects.**

Table 3 list the key attributes and criteria of a community-based training approach to program evaluation. For interested readers, a more detailed description follows. Others may wish to skip to Section II.D, the beginning of the planning guide.

Community-Based Training Program Evaluation Approach

USEFUL

Evaluations of community-based training programs should produce information and insight that is genuinely useful to program staff. They should satisfy the program's basic internal needs for information about such things as participant characteristics and performance. They should also meet the external accountability requirements of funders and sponsoring organizations (e.g., costs, placement rates).

Program evaluations should be responsive to current program issues. These could be changes in the program, major decisions pending, shifts in funding, or uncertainty in the minds of staff about specific areas of program operations and effects.

Program evaluations are unlikely to be perceived as useful unless they fit program staff beliefs about program purposes and management. Finally, useful program evaluations need to focus on things that are feasible to change.

PRACTICAL

Evaluation designs for community-based training programs should be practical. The methodologies chosen should be appropriate to the research expertise of program staff. They should also be affordable. Practicality also means realistic expectations for staff participation. There have to be enough staff to do the work that is involved, and they have to have the time to do it.

COLLABORATIVE

Collaboration is key to this approach to program evaluation.

When community-based training programs are offered jointly by community agencies and other organizations, all major training partners should work together in planning and carrying out evaluation activities. Communication and cooperation between training partners is critical to the overall well-being of these programs, not simply to their evaluation.

In a broader sense, the community-based training approach to evaluation advocates participation in evaluation by members of each local group with a major stake in program delivery and outcomes. The key stakeholder groups include trainees, program staff (teachers, counselors, managers), employers (training hosts, employers of graduates), and program advisory groups or boards.

External funders are not directly involved, but should be informed of the evaluation plan and/or consulted about information they need.

TABLE 3. COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING EVALUATION APPROACH

KEY ATTRIBUTES	KEY CRITERIA
USEFUL	- meets ongoing internal needs for information - meets external accountability needs - responsive to current program issues - fits program philosophy - implementation perspective
PRACTICAL	- methodologically feasible - economically feasible - staff available - time available
COLLABORATIVE	- training partners share responsibility - key stakeholder input (clients, staff, managers, employers, boards)
HOLISTIC	- all program components considered - all program goals considered - program processes and outcomes - considers the whole as well as the parts
INTEGRATED	- built into program operations - component evaluations coordinated into an evaluation system
FLEXIBLE	- multi-method
INCREMENTAL	- evaluation system built up over time - ongoing refinement of evaluation practices

ACCURATE	- sound research methods - justified conclusions - believeable (face validity)
ETHICAL	- respects client rights - respects staff rights - respects training partner rights
CLIENT CENTRED	- fits client needs - fits employer needs - enables client/employer feedback

It may not be practical to involve trainees, employers and even some staff (e.g., part-timers on contract) in planning a program evaluation. What is essential is that ways are set up for members of each group to express their views and form some kind of agreement about the program and about the evaluation practices being used

HOLISTIC

Evaluations of community-based training programs should take a holistic approach. Funders often place the greatest emphasis on the quality of technical training and in job placement upon completion. This can overshadow the significance of other important components of these programs, such as academic upgrading, life skills, job search training and counselling. It also diminishes other goals valued by local staff and clients, such as increased self-confidence and independence, or the decision to seek additional training and education.

The point is not that community-based training programs should evaluate all program components and goals all the time. The point is that the approach to program evaluation planning should consider the full range of program services and goals.

For the community-based training approach to evaluation, information is needed about program processes, as well as program outcomes. Without information about the actual program delivery, there is no way of judging what parts of the program are working as expected. Even successful programs need to monitor program operations in order to maintain the qualities that make them good.

Finally, the community-based training approach to evaluation is holistic because it considers the program as a whole as well as its parts. The evaluation plan must provide ways for people to make overall judgements about the program. This is in addition to evaluations of specific program components, such as course content and materials, instruction, and work placements.

INTEGRATED

Evaluation of community-based programs should not be treated as something added on to program administration and delivery. It should be integrated into program operations.

Timelines and time for collecting and examining evaluation information need to be built in to the routine cycle of program operations. Otherwise it will not happen. Or it will happen too late to be of much good. A program's ability to be responsive to client needs depends on gathering evaluation information during the program.

EVALUATION SYSTEM

The program evaluation approach advocated here calls for setting up an evaluation system. Setting up the system is actually a part of the program development process. Using it is the process of evaluation. The system consists of a framework and set of procedures for planning and carrying out evaluations of important program components and issues, and of the program as a whole, on an ongoing cyclical basis.

FLEXIBLE

The community-based training approach to program evaluation is flexible. It does not assume that one particular method of evaluation is best for all occasions. The approach respects the use of multiple methods of data collection and analysis, depending on the particular evaluation purposes, resources, client characteristics and preferences of those in charge.

INCREMENTAL

The process of developing an evaluation system is incremental and ongoing. Certain evaluation processes are likely to be initiated during the beginning phase of program implementation, such as trainee performance measures. Others, such as followup surveys of program graduates are unlikely to be developed until the program has passed through a couple of cycles.

The community-based training evaluation approach does not assume that evaluation practices are perfect and everlasting. Ongoing refinement of evaluation practices is expected.

ACCURATE

The community-based training evaluation approach is intended to to help local staff monitor the quality of their programs and identify needs for improvement. This requires accurate information from using sound research methods. The methodology sections of this manual are designed to help community-based program staff develop sound research methods within the practical limitations of resources and local research expertise.

Two other criteria apply to the accuracy of evaluations of community-based training programs. First, evaluation study conclusions should have some basis in the findings.

Second, evaluation findings have to be believable to program staff. This begins with the selection of evaluation methods that the staff believe in.

The issue here is not the search for some ultimate objective truth. The issue is to produce information that people are willing to accept as true, because they believe the sources are reliable.

ETHICAL

Evaluations of community-based training programs must be ethical. Sensitivity and respect for the rights of clients and staff have to be exercised in both gathering and using evaluation data. This means that participants in the evaluation process should be made aware of what is going on and what is going to come of it.

It also means providing guarantees of anonymity in the presentation of public reports evaluating the program.

When programs are delivered jointly by more than one organization, training partners must demonstrate respect for each others rights as well.

CLIENT-CENTRED

One of the most important attributes of the community-based training approach to program evaluation is that it is client-centred. By clients, in this instance, we mean both trainees and potential future employers.

The *evaluation should not employ performance standards and measures which are insensitive to the needs and characteristics of trainees* served by these kinds of programs.

Evaluation should not be guided simply by an interest in how well trainees are performing. Equally important is the question of how well the program is serving their particular needs.

Community-based training programs are intended to serve particular segments of the labor market, as well as specific groups of employment disadvantaged adults and youth. A program that is based on an inaccurate assessment of employer needs, or that does not keep on top of changing employer needs, will not be of much help to either client group.

Evaluations of community-based training programs have to *build in ways of monitoring training requirements from the employer perspective*. Employer expectations need to be incorporated into the procedures for assessing participant performance and program content.

Finally, the community-based training approach to program evaluation aims to *create a climate for feedback from trainees and from employers*, particularly those involved as work placement hosts.

This is not simply a matter of including an open-ended questionnaire item asking for criticisms and suggestions. It means that program staff encourage and are receptive feedback from trainees and employers all along. And it means that trainees and employers are likely to see some action in response to their feedback.

Limitations to the Approach

Locally-directed program evaluations are not without limitations. Most obvious is the bias that can creep into evaluation planning and the interpretation of evaluation results.

Program staff may sub-consciously or purposefully avoid evaluation of weak areas of program operations. Their interpretations of evaluation findings are subject to the natural human tendency to look for evidence to confirm what we already know or want to believe is true. Their reports of evaluation findings are subject to the pressure to present the program in the best light in order to ensure continued funding.

Despite these limitations, we believe that locally-directed evaluations are necessary and useful to the ongoing process of improvement and maintenance of community-based training programs.

Third party evaluations are sometimes heralded as the alternative to self-evaluation in the hands of program staff. Some government programs require (and fund) local projects to contract third party evaluations. Even at the local level, program staff may decide on their own that an outside perspective is desireable for evaluation of all or parts of their program.

The evaluation approach advocated here is not inconsistent with third party evaluation. Involving a "third party" in planning and carrying out an evaluation need not mean giving up control over what questions the evaluation addresses and how information is gathered and used. Regardless of who actually carries out the evaluation, the community-based training approach calls for evaluation planning and management by a local evaluation team (see Section II.D).

II.D ORGANIZING AN EVALUATION TEAM

GUIDELINES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Why an Evaluation Team?
- What is the Evaluation Team's Role?
- Who Should be on the Evaluation Team?
- Who Should Chair the Evaluation Team?

PROCEDURES FOR ORGANIZING AN EVALUATION TEAM

II.D ORGANIZING AN EVALUATION TEAM

Guidelines and Considerations

Who is responsible for planning and administering the local evaluation of community-based training programs?

TABLE 4

EVALUATION TEAM GUIDELINES

1. Share responsibility for program evaluation planning, management and utilization among staff and training partners.
2. Establish an evaluation team to plan and manage the evaluation process.
3. Select members representing key participants in program administration and delivery.
4. Select team members who are likely to use evaluation results.
5. Recruit team members who have a commitment and time to work on evaluation process.
6. Recruit team members who are knowledgeable and empowered to act on behalf of colleagues.
7. Define role and responsibilities of the evaluation team.
8. Allocate time and resources for the evaluation team's work.
9. Select a chairperson who knows the organizational context and can communicate efficiently with other members.
10. Select a chairperson whose job is not vulnerable to program cutbacks.

Worksheets 1 - 3 at the end of Section II.D will help you define the evaluation team's role and select team members.

WHY AN EVALUATION TEAM?

Responsibility for planning and managing evaluations of community-based training programs should be shared among relevant decision-makers and information users at the local program level.

Program evaluation is not just the responsibility of program managers. Evaluation is not the separate responsibility of each staff member. Evaluation is not the sole responsibility of one training partner where more than one is involved. In practical terms this means organizing an evaluation team with specific responsibilities for planning and managing the program evaluation process.

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION TEAM'S ROLE?

The program evaluation team's mission is to plan, manage and attempt to use the results of program evaluations. Team members may or may not participate in the actual development of evaluation instruments and in the collection of data.

Specific responsibilities of the program evaluation team could include the following (Worksheet 1):

EVALUATION TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

1. **Plan program evaluation focus and questions.**
2. **Plan methods and timeline for developing evaluation instruments, data collection, data analysis and reporting.**
3. **Review and approve evaluation instruments.**
4. **Monitor implementation of evaluation plan.**
5. **Interpret evaluation findings.**
6. **Plan follow-up actions.**
7. **Monitor follow-up actions.**
8. **Review and recycle program evaluation process.**

Clear definition and agreement on the evaluation teams' role is important. Time should be specifically scheduled for its work.

These requirements should not be dismissed in situations where "the team" consists of the entire staff. Existing groups need a clear understanding of when they are acting as the evaluation team.

WHO SHOULD BE ON THE EVALUATION TEAM?

The composition of an evaluation team will certainly vary from program to program. For programs with few staff run by a single agency it may be possible to involve the entire staff on the team. For joint programs and programs with many staff, it will be more practical to set up a representative team.

A basic principle is that team members should represent the key participants in program administration and delivery. The list of possible participant groups is fairly long: agency administrators, advisory groups or boards, program administrators, instructors/trainers, support services personnel (e.g., placement personnel, counselors), clerical staff, employers (host trainers, employers of graduates), and consultants. For joint training programs there might be equivalent personnel in each category. Worksheet #1 provides a simple grid for identifying possible evaluation team members.

There are practical limits on who all can or should be involved. You want a reasonably representative group. Beyond that, it is important to recruit people who are genuinely interested in the program, who are willing and have the time to deal with evaluation concerns, and who have the power to use the information obtained in a constructive way.

Worksheet 3 suggests the following criteria for evaluation team selection.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION TEAM SELECTION

1. **Potential user of evaluation results.**
2. **Stability of future involvement in program.**
3. **Availability to work on evaluation team.**
4. **Interest in program improvement & evaluation.**
5. **Acceptability to program peers.**
6. **Skills in evaluation methods & process.**

A key principle of the community-based training approach to program evaluation is that evaluations are done primarily to meet the information needs of local program administrators and staff. What this means is that the evaluation team should consist of people directly involved in program administration and delivery.

All too often people think of responsibility for program evaluation in terms of whose job it is to see that evaluation tasks are carried out. This places the emphasis on carrying out evaluation procedures rather than on using evaluation results.

The community-based training approach to evaluation places the emphasis on utilization. Responsibility for program evaluation planning rests with specific individuals who have an interest and need to learn about the program and who have the power to use that information for program improvement.

The creation of an evaluation team is not intended to undermine the collaborative management approaches of many community agencies. If the team includes representatives of various program staff groups, it is important that those selected are respected by colleagues, knowledgeable of their interests, and empowered to act on their behalf in setting up a program evaluation process. Consultation with peer groups can be built into the planning process.

Part time staff present a particular problem. They may not be available for extra meetings, and can legitimately expect to be paid for extra time spent on evaluation planning. There is also the question of whether they will be involved in future program cycles.

An evaluation team should be made up of program people who can act on results and recommendations.

Trainees are not included in the list of possible evaluation team members. That may seem odd for an evaluation approach that aims to be client-centred. The point is that trainees are not really in a position to participate in evaluation planning before they get into the program, and have little authority to do anything about evaluation results once they leave.

Opportunities for trainees to express their opinions about the program's evaluation practices can be built into the evaluation plan, even if they do not sit on the team. For example, they can be asked for input or reaction to evaluation instruments as they are developed or refined. Questions about the evaluation process can be included in other evaluation instruments, such as course evaluation questionnaires.

WHO SHOULD CHAIR THE EVALUATION TEAM?

Who should chair a community-based training program evaluation team?

The first impulse is to say the program manager. But program managers are often on contract. They may come into the job at the last moment, after many of the program development decisions have already been made by larger sponsoring organizations. They may have little knowledge initially of the organizational context in which the program is situated. They are likely to be preoccupied with getting the program going if it is new, or settling into their new position. And most importantly, there may be no guarantee that they will be around after their initial contract is up.

Program managers should certainly be on the evaluation team. Whether program managers should chair the evaluation team depends on how stable the program is, how stable their job is, how much experience they have with program evaluation planning and who else is available from the sponsoring organization(s).

An effective chairperson will be knowledgeable of the program and its organizational context, able to communicate efficiently with other team members, familiar with evaluation planning, and not highly vulnerable to program termination.

Suggested Procedures for Organizing an Evaluation Team

The following procedures (Worksheet 4) present asequence of tasks for organizing a community-based training program evaluation team. Worksheets 1 - 3 will assist you in carrying out these tasks.

PROCEDURES FOR ORGANIZING EVALUATION TEAM

1. **Organize meeting of key program administrators and staff to complete or plan the following steps.**
2. **Define the responsibilities of the evaluation team. (Worksheet #1)**
3. **Identify potential evaluation team members by position and affiliation. (Worksheet #2)**
4. **Establish criteria and process for selecting, recruiting and replacing evaluation team. (Worksheet #3)**
5. **Consult with relevant constituencies about team purpose and selection, if necessary.**
6. **Hold second meeting to revise definition of team purpose and team selection process, if necessary.**
7. **Implement process for selecting evaluation team members.**
8. **Schedule evaluation team orientation meeting to:**
    - **a. Review purpose of team**
    - **b. Choose a chairperson**
    - **c. Set schedule for program evaluation meetings.**

The procedures outlined may be generalizable to a wide range of settings. Some steps may not apply in particular cases. Where "the staff" make up both the organizing group and the evaluation team, for example, steps 5 and 6 would be unnecessary, and the entire process could be handled in a single meeting.

WORKSHEET 1

SAMPLE DEFINITION OF EVALUATION TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

1. PLAN PROGRAM EVALUATION FOCUS AND QUESTIONS
2. PLAN METHODS AND TIMELINE FOR:
   - A. DEVELOPING EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS
   - B. DATA COLLECTION
   - C. DATA ANALYSIS
   - D. REPORTING
3. REVIEW AND APPROVE EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS
4. MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION PLAN
5. INTERPRET EVALUATION FINDINGS
6. PLAN FOLLOWUP ACTIONS

WORKSHEET 2

LIST OF POSSIBLE EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS

ROLE GROUP	COMMUNITY AGENCY	TRAINING PARTNERS
Sponsoring organization administrators		
Advisory groups or boards		
Program administrators		
Instructors & trainers		
Support services staff (placement, counseling, etc.)		
Employers (host trainers, graduates)		
Other (clerical staff, trainees, consultants,etc.)		

WORKSHEET 3

SAMPLE CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION TEAM SELECTION

1. POTENTIAL USER OF EVALUATION RESULTS
2. STABILITY OF FUTURE INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM
3. AVAILABILITY TO WORK ON EVALUATION TEAM
4. INTEREST IN PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND EVALUATION
5. ACCEPTABILITY TO PROGRAM PEERS
6. SKILLS IN EVALUATION METHODS AND PROCESS

WORKSHEET 4

PROCEDURES FOR ORGANIZING EVALUATION TEAM

1. Organize meeting of key program administrators and staff to complete or plan the following steps.

2. Define the responsibilities of the evaluation team. (Worksheet #1)

3. Identify potential evaluation team members by position and affiliation. (Worksheet #2)

4. Establish criteria and process for selecting, recruiting and replacing evaluation team. (Worksheet #3)

5. Consult with relevant constituencies about team purpose and selection, if necessary.

6. Hold second meeting to revise definition of team purpose and team selection process, if necessary.

7. Implement process for selecting evaluation team members.

8. Schedule evaluation team orientation meeting to:
   a. Review purpose of team
   b. Choose a chairperson
   c. Set schedule for program evaluation meetings.

II.E FOCUSSING THE EVALUATION PURPOSE

PROGRAM EVALUATION PURPOSES

- Guidelines and Considerations
- Who Decides the Purpose?
- What are the Purposes?

PROGRAM EVALUATION FOCUS

- The Scope of Evaluation
- The Starting Point
- Program Goals
- Program Features
- Summarizing the Existing Evaluation System
- Summarizing the Planned Evaluation System

II.E FOCUSSING THE EVALUATION PURPOSE

Sub-section II.E contains guidelines and procedures for planning:

- **the program evaluation purpose**
- **the program evaluation focus**
- **the program evaluation questions**

These planning decisions should be made by a program evaluation team as described in Sub-section II.D.

Program Evaluation Purposes

GUIDELINES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The following guidelines will assist you in defining the purposes of your program evaluation.

TABLE 5
EVALUATION PURPOSE GUIDELINES

1. **Program evaluation purposes are clearly understood by program deliverers.**
2. **Local program deliverers define the purposes of program evaluation.**
3. **Program evaluation serves the information needs of local program deliverers.**
4. **Relevant training partners agree on program evaluation purposes.**
5. **All major purposes of program evaluation are identified.**
6. **External accountability requirements are covered.**
7. **Basic training program information needs are covered.**
8. **Work towards evaluation for program improvement.**

9. **Clarify specific evaluation purposes for key program components or concerns.**

10. **Reassess program evaluation purposes on a cyclical basis.**

WHO DECIDES THE PURPOSE?

Rule one is that the reasons for evaluating the program are not a mystery to local program deliverers. Local staff should know and understand the purposes for evaluating their program.

This can be accomplished in part by making sure that local program sponsors and staff take the lead in deciding the purposes of evaluation. This does not mean ignoring the evaluation requirements of funders or other monitoring agencies. It simply means that deliberate decisions are made by the local evaluation team concerning the purposes of their evaluation activities.

When community agencies offer joint training programs with community colleges or other organizations, it is imperative that the key training partners agree on program evaluation purposes. Without such agreement, the information base for decision-making about program continuation and change will be fragmented between training partners.

WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES?

Program evaluation experts often counsel evaluation planners to define a single overall purpose for evaluation. Reality is not so simple. Local staff are likely to have various purposes for program evaluation. The aim is to clarify and seek an appropriate balance between these purposes.

The long range goal is to build an ongoing program evaluation system into local program operations. The ideal purpose is to use program evaluation to improve and maintain program quality. Before program staff can really get into evaluation for program improvement, however, there are some basic evaluation purposes which have to be addressed.

Due to external funding, community-based training programs have **accountability** requirements. They are likely to focus on such things as trainee characteristics, staff qualifications, program objectives, finances, and trainee completion and placement rates. Ensuring that the program evaluation system covers accountability information needs is a basic requirement for program survival.

With any training program there are certain **basic evaluation practices**. Criteria and procedures to evaluate applicants for training have to be set up. Procedures for measuring and making judgements about trainee performance in the classroom and on-the-job have to be put into place. Evaluations of student satisfaction with the program may be regarded as essential by the staff. These and other evaluation practices (see Worksheet 8, end of this Section) are integral parts of program operations.

Addressing the basic evaluation needs of a program is part of initial program development. Once these needs have been taken care of, program staff can expand the evaluation system to other concerns, or work on improving existing evaluation practices.

The ideal purpose for local program evaluation is **program improvement**. Program improvement means monitoring program delivery and effects to make sure acceptable standards are maintained, particularly when changes are introduced. It means setting up ways of evaluating program components or concerns that were not previously included in the local evaluation system. It means refining existing evaluation practices to get more useful and valid information.

It is important to think beyond the overall purposes of the evaluation system to the specific reasons for evaluating different program components and concerns. This will be taken up in greater detail in the succeeding discussions on evaluation focus and questions.

An underlying premise in this manual is that the general and specific purposes of program evaluation are flexible. Different purposes may get more or less emphasis at different times. New purposes may be identified in response to program changes imposed by outside authorities or initiated by local staff.

Time should be set aside on a regular basis for the local evaluation team to reassess the general and specific purposes of its program evaluation system.

Program Evaluation Focus

THE SCOPE OF EVALUATION

The evaluation **planning guide will help you plan the overall evaluation** of a community-based training program **and the evaluation of specific program components** (e.g., course evaluation, evaluation of instruction).

Evaluation texts often warn evaluation planners not to try to cover every aspect of a program when designing an evaluation study. The watchword is "focus." Keep the evaluation study focussed on a few important questions or issues. This is good advice for one shot evaluation studies of human services programs. It is not what is being proposed here.

Here we advocate the incremental development and refinement of an ongoing program evaluation system as part of routine program operations. Such things as participant screening, participant performance evaluation, course evaluation, evaluation of instruction, evaluation of work placements, of support services, and even followup studies, can become part of the training program design. They are not something to do only on an irregular and intermittent basis.

Program staff may feel pressured during the program development and early implementation stages to get the basic evaluation procedures into place. The methods developed or chosen initially will not necessarily be the most effective means of evaluating the program.

Viewed this way, the routine evaluation practices of a program themselves can be evaluated with an eye towards improvement once they are in place.

The community-based training model of program evaluation proposed in this manual takes **a developmental perspective on program evaluation focus**, consisting of three stages.

STAGE 1: TAKE CARE OF ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

STAGE 2: GET BASIC EVALUATION PRACTICES INTO PLACE

STAGE 3: TAKE ON A PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT ORIENTATION

Program evaluation at stage 3 is three dimensional.

First, the evaluation system continues to respond to accountability requirements. Second, basic evaluation practices are maintained (course, instruction, trainee performance, etc.). Third, the program staff periodically select one or two program components for special evaluation to aid in program improvement.

A program's overall evaluation system has a comprehensive focus. The specific evaluation focus for program improvement is narrow.

THE STARTING POINT

Most evaluation manuals assume that a program evaluation is being planned from scratch. They tell people where to go without asking where they are and where they have been.

This manual differs. It helps you **build from what you are already doing or planning to do to evaluate your program**.

It assumes that many of the "users" of the manual are working with existing programs, and that they are already evaluating their programs in some way. It assumes that developers of new programs using the manual probably have definite ideas about what needs to be evaluated (though they may be searching for effective ways to do it).

The planning guide is based on the principle that **PLANS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION MUST BE DEVELOPED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EXISTING PROGRAM EVALUATION SYSTEM**.

The starting point for planning an evaluation of a community based-training program is to construct a picture of the existing program evaluation system.

The existing evaluation system can be at any stage of development, from initial planning to fully in place. It can involve highly formal evaluation methods, such as standardized questionnaires and interviews, and highly informal methods, such as staff discussion.

This part of the planning guide will help you:

1. **construct a picture of your program evaluation system (Worksheets 5 & 6)**
2. **identify what parts of that system will be carried on or changed during the next cycle of evaluation.**

TWO FRAMEWORKS FOR EVALUATION PLANNING

Different programs approach evaluation in different ways. Some put the emphasis on evaluating the accomplishment of program goals. Others do not.

To accomodate this variation, we present two frameworks for evaluation planning. One takes **program goals** as the basis for evaluation planning (Worksheet 5). The other takes **program features** (e.g., recruitment, course content, instruction) as the basis for evaluation planning (Worksheet 6). The two frameworks and procedures can be used independently or together.

PROGRAM GOALS

The **goals** we are referring to are overall program goals, and related major objectives where they exist. These are broad statements of direction that describe the program's mission -- who it aims to serve, what it aims to do for the clients, etc.

Goal statements should provide clear descriptions of what the program is trying to accomplish, but they need not specify how that will be measured. Designing measurement procedures is secondary to the statement of basic goals. A few tips for writing program goals are listed on Worksheet 7.

This manual puts less emphasis than many evaluation primers on overall program goals as the basis for evaluation. This does not deny the need for program staff to have clear ideas of what they are trying to accomplish in the program. It simply recognizes the following:

-- not all community-based training programs have concise statements of program goals that accurately reflect the program staff's aims.

-- program staff often do not talk about their expectations for program characteristics, activities and outcomes in terms of "goals".

-- goal clarification can be a result rather than a pre-condition of program evaluation.

-- there are other ways of framing evaluation questions than program goals.

The approach taken here is open on the use of program goals for planning program evaluations. Program staff may wish to orient their evaluations towards some set of broad program goals. They may not.

Worksheets 5 and 6 are **sample forms** to be copied and used **for summarizing existing evaluation practices** in community-based training programs.

Worksheet 5 will help you make a goal-based summary of the existing evaluation system. Worksheet 6 will help you make a program features-based picture of the system.

PROGRAM FEATURES

A **program features-based summary** of an existing evaluation system does not depend on the existence of an explicit set of program goals. Program staff simply work their way through the major features of the program asking and describing how they are currently evaluating each one.

Worksheet 8 lists twelve program features common to many community-based training programs which are often a focus of evaluation. These 12 features include:

KEY PROGRAM FEATURES

1. PROGRAM GOALS
2. TRAINEE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION
3. COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS
   * TECHNICAL
   * ACADEMIC
   * LIFE SKILLS
4. INSTRUCTION
   * TECHNICAL
   * ACADEMIC
   * LIFE SKILLS
5. TRAINEE PARTICIPATION AND PERFORMANCE
   * TECHNICAL
   * ACADEMIC
   * LIFE SKILLS
6. WORK PLACEMENTS
7. VOCATIONAL/PERSONAL COUNSELING
8. JOB PLACEMENT SERVICES
9. ACCESS SUPPORT SERVICES
10. TRAINEE OUTCOMES
    * COMPLETION
    * FOLLOWUP
11. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION
12. OVERALL PROGRAM EVALUATION

WORKSHEET # 5

SUMMARY OF EXISTING EVALUATION SYSTEM (Goal Based)

MAJOR PROGRAM GOAL/OBJECTIVE (WRITE OUT): ____

____

____

(1) How will we evaluate it? (Methods & Sources)	(2) What are we looking at? (Characteristics, processes, Outcomes)	(3) What are we trying to find out? (Evaluation Questions)	(4) Information Use?

CURRENT CONCERNS? (Describe)

NEED FOR CHANGE IN EVALUATION PRACTICE? (Explain)

WORKSHEET # 6

SUMMARY OF EXISTING EVALUATION SYSTEM (PROGRAM FEATURES)

Major Program Feature (name): ____________________

(1) How are we evaluating it? (Methods & Sources of Information)	(2) What are we looking at? (characteristics, processes, outcomes)	(3) What are we trying to find out? (Evaluation Questions)	(4) How are we using the Information?

CURRENT CONCERNS? (Describe)

NEED FOR CHANGE IN EVALUATION PRACTICE? (Explain)

SUMMARIZING THE EXISTING EVALUATION SYSTEM

If you wish to develop or maintain a goal-based program evaluation system, then make several copies of Worksheet 5. A worksheet is completed for each major program goal or objective.

After completing a goal-based summary of the existing evaluation system, you may wish to work through the program features-based worksheets (# 6), as well. Worksheets 5 and 6 will give you a more precise map of how you are approaching the evaluation of specific program features.

Completion of these worksheets for each major program goal and/or major program feature by local evaluation team members will result in a working description of the program's current (or anticipated) evaluation system.

Methods and Sources of Information

The left hand column of each worksheet poses the question "how are we evaluating it (methods & sources of information)?". Here you will list specific information gathering methods and tools in place (or planned if it is a new program).

Worksheet 9 lists the following alternative methods of evaluation information collection to aid in this task.

Methods of Collecting Program Evaluation Information

* **Questionnaires and Ratings**
* **Interviews**
* **Systematic observations**
* **Tests**
* **Program records/documents**
* **Logs**
* **Trainee feedback**
* **Staff discussion**
* **No organized methods in place**

The methods listed are covered in Section III of this manual (Methods of Collecting Evaluation Information). The description of existing evaluation methods should specify the sources of information, as well as the information gathering methods (e.g., student course evaluation questionnaires, employer work placement evaluation interviews, trainee personal logs).

Do not feel pressured to state formal evaluation procedures for every major program feature (or goal). The purpose of the task at this point is to get an accurate picture of the existing evaluation system. Important gaps in the system can be noted, and plans made to introduced changes in the evaluation system, if the staff believe that is necessary.

Information Objectives

In the second column of Worksheets 5 and 6 you should briefly state what things the evaluation methods listed in column one gather information about. Consider these three possibilities:

- **program characteristics**
- **program processes**
- **program outcomes**

An evaluation instrument could provide information on one or on a combination of these possibilities.

Program characteristics refers to the material features of the program. This includes written statements of goals and performance objectives, recruitment policies and procedures, participant characteristics, course descriptions, learning materials and equipment, facilities, staff, evaluation instruments, recordkeeping forms, completion certificates, training allowances, operating budgets, and the like.

Evaluations of program characteristics are concerned with program design and with the resources allocated to program delivery. An assessment of the appropriateness of terminal performance objectives or curriculum materials vis a vis the current job market, for example, would be an evaluation of the characteristics of Course Content and Materials. An assessment of the qualifications of teachers would be an evaluation of one of the characteristics of Instruction.

Evaluations of **program process** focus on documenting how program services are actually delivered, and on the fit between what actually happens and what was expected to happen. A process evaluation of Course Content and Materials, for example, would aim to find out what learning activities actually took place, what information was covered, what materials were used, and so on. This information can then be compared to course descriptions and other curriculum plans to get a picture of what the program looks like in theory and in practice.

Outcome evaluations are aimed at measuring the effects of the program on trainees (skills, attitudes toward work, employment, income, etc.).

These three categories of information are listed on Worksheet 5 and 6 as reminders of what to consider for each program feature or goal. You should list the actual program characteristics, process and outcomes examined.

Evaluation Questions

Column three of Worksheets 5 and 6 challenges you to state what you are trying to find out using the evaluation methods listed. What are the **evaluation questions**? In some cases the program staff may have worked out explicit evaluation questions. Often, however, evaluation questions for specific goals and program features are not formally stated, are not common knowledge among the staff, and can only be inferred from the items included in existing evaluation instruments.

Evaluation questions are key to focussing a program evaluation. Without them, data gathering becomes an end unto itself. If program staff have nothing particular to ask of the information they gather, they are unlikely to learn much from it, and to find much use in carrying out program evaluation activities.

You may be unable to fill in column three, due to lack of certainty or consensus on relevant evaluation questions. In that case, consider setting up a process and time for clarifying the evaluation questions the program evaluation system is intended to answer.

In formulating evaluation questions, you and other members of your evaluation team are not limited to your own opinions. You can draw ideas for questions from many sources.

Some sources of ideas for evaluation questions include the following (not listed in any particular order):

TABLE 6

SOURCES OF IDEAS FOR EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- **funder guidelines and interests**
- **accountability requirements**
- **program goals/objectives**
- **occupational performance standards**
- **previous evaluations**
- **evaluations of other programs**
- **program plans for new initiatives/change**
- **program staff opinions (sponsoring agency, training partners)**
- **trainee opinions**
- **opinions of employers**
- **advisory board member opinions**
- **the vocational education literature**

Specify what sources of evaluation questions will be consulted, if they are not already in place or if they need to be revised. As a general rule, efforts should be made first to draw on sources directly connnected with the program. This helps make sure the questions are relevant to local information users.

Worksheet 10 provides **a checklist for writing evaluation questions.** The relevance of evaluation questions depends on linking them to specific program evaluation concerns, and on thinking through what difference the answers could make to the program.

Evaluation questions that ask for descriptive responses are preferred to those that ask for value judgements. This is the difference between asking "How effective is the program in changing trainee attitudes towards work?" and "What effects does the program have on trainee attitudes towards work?". The first question directs the evaluation design towards gathering judgements about program effectiveness. The second question calls for descriptions of actual program effects on trainees.

Evaluation questions will be of little use if no one can remember them. Write them down and keep them around. It sounds trite. But in fact, the "questions" underlying the development of questionnaires, interviews, records forms and other evaluation instruments are often not written down at the time the forms are put together. They are unlikely to be remembered in the same way when the time comes to interpret the findings.

Evaluation questions do not just give focus to the development of information collection procedures. Evaluation questions are important to guide analysis. They help program staff extract meaning from evaluation information in an organized way.

They also provide a basis from which to critique and revise the evaluation instruments. If existing information gathering procedures do not produce adequate information to answer the evaluation questions, then either the evaluation tools or the questions need to be revised. Without clear evaluation questions, program staff have little basis for assessing the quality of the information obtained.

The rule is simple. Write down your evaluation questions. Refer to them when interpreting evaluation information.

Utilization of Findings

Column four on the summary worksheets for existing program evaluation systems asks "**How are we using the information?**".

The possibilities for using program evaluation information are quite varied. Information might be used for accountability purposes, for lobbying funders, for assessing individual client performance, for judging overall program effects, for monitoring the implementation of the program, and so on.

The point here is not so much how the information is used as the fact of its use. The emphasis in this manual is on the production of program evaluation information that is genuinely useful to local program staff, particularly as it relates to decision-making for program improvement.

Evaluation team members may be unable to state what use is made (or will be made) of evaluation information being gathered about major goals or program features. Even if they can identify a use, they may not be satisfied with the ways it is being used.

In either case, you should consider changing the evaluation system to increase the utilization potential of the evaluation information being gathered. Ideas for increasing the usefulness of evaluation information are interspersed throughout all sections of this manual.

Revising the Evaluation System

At the bottom of the worksheets for describing the existing evaluation system, space is provided to **record current concerns and ideas for change in evaluation practice**.

Current concerns can be either of two types:

1. **concerns about program operations vis a vis specific program goals or program features.**
2. **concerns about the appropriateness and effectivenss of existing evaluation practices vis a vis those goals and features.**

Either category of concern, or combination of concerns, could be cause for a change in existing evaluation practices.

For example, you might have concerns about the quality of supervision trainees are getting on work placements. After describing the existing means of evaluating work placement experiences, note that concern in the space provided. Then ask yourself whether the existing evaluation procedures are adequate for monitoring and assessing the quality of workplace supervision, or whether the procedures need to be modified or entirely changed.

In the process of describing the existing evaluation system, you may become aware of program goals or features which are not being systematically analyzed. You may or may not regard this as a cause for concern. You could decide that existing informal evaluation procedures are adequate. You might decide to mount a special evaluation study of that goal or program feature during the next evaluation cycle. You might decide to revise existing evaluation methods.

Worksheets 5 and 6 serve two functions.

1. **They help program staff clarify in an organized way the system of evaluation practices currently in place.**
2. **They help program staff identify needs for modifying the existing program evaluation system in anticipation of the next evaluation cycle.**

Modifications include revising or adding to existing evaluation instruments, introducing new evaluation methods, or even deleting past evaluation instruments and procedures.

SUMMARIZING THE PLANNED EVALUATION SYSTEM

The next step is to construct a **summary of the evaluation system to be carried out during the next evaluation cycle**. Changes in the evaluation system resulting from the analysis of existing evaluation practices should be incorporated into this summary plan.

This procedure can be carried out for a goal-based evaluation system, a program features-based system, or a combination of the two. Sample forms for completing a "Summary of Planned Evaluation System" are attached here as Worksheets 11 and 12.

The purpose of this procedure is to get a quick snapshot of **the evaluation essentials**:

- **-- information collection methods/sources**
- **-- evaluation questions**
- **-- information objectives**
- **-- expected uses**

This will establish in concrete terms the purpose and focus of the upcoming evaluation.

WORKSHEET #11

SUMMARY OF PLANNED EVALUATION SYSTEM (GOAL BASED)

MAJOR PROGRAM GOAL/OBJECTIVE (WRITE OUT):

(1) How will we evaluate it? (Methods & Sources)	(2) What will we look at? (Characteristics, Processes, Outcomes)	(3) What are we trying to find out? (Evaluation Questions)	(4) How will we use the Information Use

Plan for Revised or New Evaluation Practices (methods, focus, questions, uses):

WORKSHEET #12

SUMMARY OF PLANNED EVALUATION SYSTEM (PROGRAM FEATURES)

MAJOR PROGRAM FEATURE (name): ____

(1) How will we evaluate it? (Methods & Sources)	(2) What will we look at? (Characteristics, Processes, Outcomes)	(3) What are we trying to find out? (Evaluation Questions)	(4) How will we use the Information Use

Plan for Revised or New Evaluation Practices (methods, focus, questions, uses):

The information recorded on Worksheets 11 and 12 can then be elaborated into a scheduled plan for data collection, analysis and reportings (see Section II.F).

Worksheets 11 and 12 follow a format similar to that introduced for summarizing the existing evaluation system. Some minor changes in wording are used to reflect the future orientation of the evaluation plan (e.g.,"How WILL we evaluate it?" rather than "How are we evaluating it?").

At the bottom of the summary worksheets for the planned evaluation system, space is provided to describe how the previously identified changes in the existing system will be carried out. Build time and resources for revision of existing evaluation procedures or the development of new ones into the upcoming schedule of evaluation activities.

The product of Worksheets 11 and 12 is a revised and updated description of the local program evaluation system, which incorporates planned modifications in evaluation practices identified in the analysis of the existing system.

Completing a description of the existing and planned program evaluation system will undoubtedly be time-consuming the first time through. Once it has been done, however, the resulting summaries can be used as the basis for planning the next evaluation cycle. In other words, the "Summary of Planned Evaluation System" should correspond to the "Summary of the Existing Evaluation System" the next time around. It will only be necessary to review it and check whether it is still an accurate description of the evaluation practices, and then note whether there are any new concerns which warrant additional changes in the evaluation methods.

WORKSHEET # 5

SUMMARY OF EXISTING EVALUATION SYSTEM (Goal Based)

MAJOR PROGRAM GOAL/OBJECTIVE (WRITE OUT): ____

____

____

(1) How will we evaluate it? (Methods & Sources)	(2) What are we looking at? (Characteristics, processes, Outcomes)	(3) What are we trying to find out? (Evaluation Questions)	(4) Information Use?

CURRENT CONCERNS? (Describe)

NEED FOR CHANGE IN EVALUATION PRACTICE? (Explain)

WORKSHEET # 6

SUMMARY OF EXISTING EVALUATION SYSTEM (PROGRAM FEATURES)

Major Program Feature (name): ______________________________

(1) How are we evaluating it? (Methods & Sources of Information)	(2) What are we looking at? (characteristics, processes, outcomes)	(3) What are we trying to find out? (Evaluation Questions)	(4) How are we using the Information?

CURRENT CONCERNS? (Describe)

NEED FOR CHANGE IN EVALUATION PRACTICE? (Explain)

WORKSHEET 7

TIPS FOR WRITING PROGRAM GOALS

1. DEVELOP YOUR OWN GOALS.
2. STAFF DEVELOP PROGRAM GOALS TOGETHER.
3. FOCUS ON GOALS THAT MATTER TO PROGRAM STAFF.
4. STATE A SINGLE OUTCOME FOR EACH GOAL.
5. DESCRIBE A CLEAR RESULT FOR EACH GOAL.
6. WRITE GOALS WITH ACTIVE VERBS IN THE FUTURE TENSE.
7. USE ADJECTIVES TO CLARIFY DESIRED OUTCOMES (QUALITIES, PERFORMANCE LEVELS)
8. USE UNDERSTANDABLE LANGUAGE.
9. FOCUS ON WHAT IS EXPECTED TO HAPPEN, NOT ON HOW IT WILL BE MEASURED.

Adapted from Michael Q. Patton, Practical Evaluation. Beverley Hills, Ca: Sage Publications. 1982.

WORKSHEET 8

COMMONLY EVALUATED FEATURES OF COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMS

1. PROGRAM GOALS
2. TRAINEE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION
3. COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS
    * TECHNICAL
    * ACADEMIC
    * LIFE SKILLS
4. INSTRUCTION
    * TECHNICAL
    * ACADEMIC
    * LIFE SKILLS
5. TRAINEE PARTICIPATION AND PERFORMANCE
    * TECHNICAL
    * ACADEMIC
    * LIFE SKILLS
6. WORK PLACEMENTS
7. VOCATIONAL/PERSONAL COUNSELING
8. JOB PLACEMENT SERVICES
9. ACCESS SUPPORT SERVICES
10. TRAINEE OUTCOMES
    * COMPLETION
    * FOLLOWUP
11. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION
12. OVERALL PROGRAM EVALUATION

WORKSHEET 9

METHODS OF COLLECTING EVALUATION INFORMATION

1. QUESTIONNAIRES & RATINGS
2. INTERVIEWS
3. SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION
4. TESTS
5. PROGRAM RECORDS/DOCUMENTS
6. LOGS
7. TRAINEE FEEDBACK
8. STAFF DISCUSSION
9. NO ORGANIZED METHODS IN PLACE

WORKSHEET 10

EVALUATION QUESTION CHECKLIST

1. INVOLVE PROGRAM STAFF IN DEVELOPING EVALUATION QUESTIONS.

2. LINK QUESTIONS TO LOCALLY INDENTIFIED EVALUATION NEEDS.

3. SELECT ANSWERABLE QUESTIONS. INFORMATION CAN BE GATERHED ABOUT THEM.

4. DISCUSS FUTURE USEFULNESS OF THE ANSWERS.

5. WRITE QUESTIONS THAT ASK FOR DESCRIPTIVE RESPONSES, NOT VALUE JUDGEMENTS.

6. USE CLEAR, SIMPLE WORDS.

7. RECORD QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE REFERENCE.

WORKSHEET #11

SUMMARY OF PLANNED EVALUATION SYSTEM (GOAL-BASED)

MAJOR PROGRAM GOAL/OBJECTIVE (WRITE OUT):

(1) How will we evaluate it? (Methods & Sources)	(2) What will we look at? (Characteristics, Processes, Outcomes)	(3) What are we trying to find out? (Evaluation Questions)	(4) How will we use the Information Use

Plan for Revised or New Evaluation Practices (methods, focus, questions, uses):

WORKSHEET #12

SUMMARY OF PLANNED EVALUATION SYSTEM (PROGRAM FEATURES)

MAJOR PROGRAM FEATURE (name): ____

(1) How will we evaluate it? (Methods & Sources)	(2) What will we look at? (Characteristics, Processes, Outcomes)	(3) What are we trying to find out? (Evaluation Questions)	(4) How will we use the Information Use

Plan for Revised or New Evaluation Practices (methods, focus, questions, uses):

SECTION II.F PLANNING FOR INFORMATION COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

OVERVIEW

EVALUATION DESIGN

SAMPLE SELECTION

WHEN TO EVALUATE THE PROGRAM

SCHEDULING EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

II.F PLANNING FOR INFORMATION COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Overview

The purpose of Section II.F is to help you create an organized implementation plan for your evaluation system. The plan will summarize the procedures and schedule for

- **-- preparing evaluation instruments**
- **-- collecting evaluation information**
- **-- preparing and interpreting evaluation data**
- **-- reporting results**

Worksheets 13 - 15 will assist in the preparation of a program evaluation plan.

The evaluation planning activities suggested here are a logical follow-up to the procedures for clarifying the purpose and focus of evaluation laid out in Section II.E.

The practical suggestions in this part of the Planning Guide will be of most use after the following decisions about the evaluation purpose, focus and instruments have already been made.

1. Data gathering methods already selected.
2. Relevance of data gathering methods to program goals and/or features already established.
3. Evaluation questions already developed.
4. Future use of evaluation information planned.
5. Needs for evaluation instrument development or modification already established.

If these kinds of decisions have not been made, you should refer back to the previous section before proceeding with use of this part of the planning guide.

There are two major considerations which have direct bearing on planning information collection for program evaluation.

1. The design of the evaluation.
2. The selection of samples of program participants and activities to be included in the evaluation.

These two topics are briefly examined, including recommendations. Planning procedures and forms are presented after.

Design of the Evaluation

The design of an evaluation is **the overall strategy and plan for gathering information**. Evaluation design involves answering the following:

- **what information will be gathered**
- **from whom**
- **when will it be gathered**
- **what will it be compared with.**

Together, these four decisions have important implications for how much confidence one can put in findings and conclusions about program effects.

The purpose of this discussion is not to try to force program staff into selecting one or another evaluation design. The purpose is to clarify the alternatives, and in so doing, to help local evaluation planners get a better understanding of what they are doing when they evaluate their programs.

The discussion of evaluation design alternatives presented here is kept simple. Users of this manual interested in pursuing this topic in greater depth should consult some the references listed at the end of Section II.F.

The easiest way to differentiate evaluation designs is by what they use as a comparative standard. The following evaluation designs are reviewed here.

- **experimental comparison group design**
- **longitudinal comparison group design**
- **criterion objective design**
- **program group designs**
- **case study design**

EXPERIMENTAL COMPARISON GROUP DESIGN

Some evaluation designs are dependent on the use of **comparison groups as a standard**. One group of clients gets the program, or some new service within the program, while another does not. The outcomes for the two groups are compared to see if the clients getting the new or improved program fare any better than those who don't.

In the experimental comparison group design, measures of client or program performance are taken simultaneously for both groups of clients.

Experimental comparison groups are rarely used in local evaluations of community-based training programs. Their practicality is limited for reasons such as the following:

1. Developing such a design demands a level of research expertise not commonly found in such organizations.
2. The programs are unique, and program staff will only have access to information about their own participants and activities.
3. Program staff will be reluctant to withhold new services to some clients in the interests of testing the effects of those changes on others.
4. The number of clients served by many programs is so small that the "effects" of providing different services to different clients over the same time period cannot be reliably measured.

5. Experimental and near-experimental designs are more appropriate for one-shot evaluation studies than for ongoing evaluation systems.

LONGITUDINAL COMPARISON GROUP DESIGN

There is a kind of comparison group design which can be easily and effectively put to use in small community-based training organizations. This is a design which **compares participant and program performance from one program cycle to the next**.

By keeping longitudinal program evaluation records, you can track the stability of program effects between groups, and monitor the possible effects of changes in program characteristics or processes introduced at varying points in the program's history.

In order to implement this sort of design, it is extremely important to gather ongoing information about changeable features of the program, such as participant and staff characteristics, curriculum and teaching methods. Without that kind of implementation background data, the meaning of comparisons from one program cycle to the next would be lost.

CRITERION-BASED DESIGN

A third type of evaluation design uses a **criterion as a comparative standard**. Performance objectives are established for program participants. Client performance is assessed and compared to these objectives.

For the purpose of evaluating the effects of instruction on trainee performance, this is the preferred evaluation design in many community-based training programs.

Criterion-based designs are often employed only at the level of assessing individual trainee performance and outcomes. Data from the training group are not often grouped for the purpose of making judgements about the impact of the program as a whole. The potential for **grouping individual performance data for the purpose of assessing program level effects is an underused possibility for program evaluation in community-based training programs**.

Ideally, criterion-based assessments of client performance are taken at the beginning and upon completion of the program (before/after design). Without an assessment of how people were doing when they came into the program, it is hard to say how much they learned or changed as a result of their participation in the program.

The practicality of this design is highly dependent on the availability of appropriate objectives, instruments and settings for measuring participant performance at both ends of the program.

To assess program effectiveness using a criterion-based design, care is needed to make sure that the performance objectives established are attainable within the time span of the program, given the kinds of clients and the kinds of instruction and services provided. Participants in community-based programs are likely to be atypical in many respects to trainees in more conventional training settings where such standards are often created.

Community-based program evaluations often rely on criterion-based measures of client performance taken only at the end of the program. This is not a strong design for making claims about program effects.

PROGRAM GROUP DESIGNS

A fourth type of evaluation design uses the **program group as its own comparative standard**. Information about participant performance is gathered at the beginning of the program and at the end. The two sets of performance data are compared to see what changes there are. Participant performance is not evaluated against standard independent performance objectives.

This type of evaluation design is very common in community-based training programs. In the absence of clear, valid and appropriate performance objectives and ways of measuring performance against those objectives, this is not an unrealistic alternative.

Because clients in community-based training programs are often heterogeneous in their entry level academic and work backgrounds, the tendency to rely on simple within group comparisons of participant performance at the beginning and end of a program is easy to latch on to.

For individual assessment, that kind of evaluation is workable. Without standard performance objectives, it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons of participant performance across the program and between program cycles. Such comparisons are at the heart of program level evaluation.

CASE STUDY EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation designs described above are oriented towards making judgements about program success in producing certain outcomes. Not all evaluation designs have this orientation. The major alternative is **the case study design**.

This evaluation design is oriented towards increasing the program staff's understanding of how the program actually works and how it is experienced by participants.

The case study design is characterized by intensive open-ended documentation of program processes and participant experiences throughout implementation of the program cycle. The aim is more to describe what is happening, than to judge (though participant judgements may be gathered as part of the description).

Case study evaluation designs are not common in community-based programs. Sometimes local evaluation reports include "case studies" of individual clients as part of the presentation. These are typically presented as positive testimonials of program impact, with little indication of attempts to compare individual client cases for purposes of learning about the program as a whole.

Case study evaluation designs could be applied to greater advantage in community-based training programs than is presently the case. Many of these programs are quite innovative and unique in who they are designed to serve and the services they are designed to provide. As a result, it is difficult, even for program staff, to anticipate how they will actually work out in practice.

In the early stages of a program's life, or after major changes in program operations, case study evaluation approaches could contribute greatly to a program staff's own need to learn more about the experiences of participants in the program.

CHOOSING AN EVALUATION DESIGN

We are not suggesting that all evaluation designs are equal. They are not.

Which design you pick depends on what you want to find out, how strong you want to make your claims, the characteristics of your program and clients, and resources for evaluation.

The following statements about the advantages and disadvantages of the designs described above will help you think through your choice of an evaluation design.

1. Comparison group designs produce more conclusive findings about program impact than the others when properly carried out.

2. Longitudinal comparison group and criterion-based designs are better than experimental comparison group designs for ongoing evaluation systems.

3. Criterion-based designs allow for more reliable comparisons of client performance from one program cycle to the next.

4. Evaluation systems that gather before and after measures of client performance produce a sounder information base for judging program effects than those that rely on after only measures.

5. Case study evaluations produce more indepth information about program processes and client experiences.

MANY COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS USE MIXED DESIGNS. We have been talking as if you have to use a single evaluation design. In fact, many community-based programs use mixed designs.

In local evaluation reports reviewed while developing this manual, mixed designs such as the following were found:

- **criterion-based design + program group design**
- **criterion-based design + longitudinal comparison group design**
- **criterion-based design + program group design + longitudinal comparison group design**
- **program group design + client case studies**

Obviously, the use of a mixed evaluation design increases the range of discussion and insight into program activities and outcomes.

Sample Selection

When planning for evaluation information collection, any time you find yourself asking "how many", "which ones" or "how often", you are dealing with a sampling decision.

You use a sample when you find it unnecessary or do not have the resources to gather information from all the people or sources that you could.

The size and characteristics of the sample influences what you can claim about the people, things or activities from which the sample is drawn.

Sampling is not necessarily a big issue in the local evaluation of community-based training programs for the following reasons.

1. Many of these programs serve small numbers of clients, e.g., 15 to 30 per program cycle. It is not unreasonable for staff to gather information from all participants, at least during the time they are "in" the program.

2. There is little need for the program staff to try to generalize their findings beyond the program and its participants. Sampling is of greatest importance when people want to claim that observed effects are generalizable to people, activities, etc., beyond those about which information was actually gathered.

There are some relatively common situations in which sampling considerations do come into play in the evaluation of community-based training programs. The main one is for follow-up studies of program graduates.

Few local programs have mechanisms set up for ongoing follow-up of program graduates. The more common practice is to comission a special followup study every two or three years.

With that kind of interval between studies, the number of program graduates obviously multiplies. The need for and feasibility of contacting all graduates during that period demands careful consideration, and a deliberate decision about whether to settle for a sample.

TYPES OF SAMPLES

There are two basic approaches to sampling:

- **random samples**
- **selected samples.**

Random Samples

Random samples are preferred when you want to be able to generalize evaluation findings to a larger group of people or activities than those actually targeted for data collection.

In a true random sample, each source of information (person, activity, document) that could provide information has an equal chance of being chosen.

If there are important subgroups among the targeted sources of information which can be sorted out ahead of time, random samples can be drawn from each sub-group consistent with its proportion of the total group. This is called a stratified random sample, and enables generalization of findings within each sub-group, as well as for the total group.

The principle of drawing a random sample is not hard to grasp. The statistics of determining what size sample is desirable are complicated. Unless this kind of research expertise is already available among the staff in your program, our advice is to seek the help of a consultant if you want to use a random sampling procedure for some component of your program evaluation design.

Once the procedure is set up and its implications for data analysis are clear, consultative help is not necessary to carry it out. A useful introduction to the calculations involved in determining random sample sizes can be found in Enjoying Research?, a needs assessment manual published by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation (see Section II.F references).

Selected Samples

Selected samples are used to increase the usefulness of information obtained from small samples.

Use of selected samples depends on prior knowledge or access to information about the people, activities of things to be sampled. Specific criteria are chosen for selecting a small sample that will yield the greatest information return to the program as possible.

Selected samples do not permit statistically-based generalization to the larger group of people, activities, or things from which the sample is drawn. The criteria for selection, however, often permit logical generalization to the larger group.

There are several **kinds of selected samples** to choose from:

- **critical cases**
- **typical cases**
- **maximized variation**
- **convenience sample**

CRITICAL CASE sampling means that you choose examples which are known to have some features that make them extremely important or unusual.

For example, there may be particular types of clients or work placement sites that are very difficult to work with. The program staff might judge that if the program can work with those clients or in those settings, then it is likely to work with others, as well. Or they might choose those participants or sites for intensive study because of a desire to learn more about the circumstances underlying the "problem" cases.

TYPICAL CASES are chosen with an eye towards avoiding any really unusual features. This allows the program staff to be more confident that the results they see are not attributable to unique conditions other than the program.

MAXIMIZING VARIATION means that you identify one or more key characteristics which exhibit variation across the sample, and choose cases to represent the full range of variation. You choose characteristics that you believe could make a difference in program performance.

This strategy increases the confidence that common findings hold for the group. For example, if there is a wide age range in the client group, the evaluation team might decide to pick a sample that would represent the full scope of variation. A common finding, i.e., one which holds for all the cases, allows program staff to conclude that "age" is probably not a major determining factor for that finding.

CONVENIENCE SAMPLING means you go for the easiest sources of information. This strategy is not recommended. There is little to be gained from it from the standpoint of getting the most useful information possible from a small sample.

If you must use convenience sampling, take care to get enough information about the actual people or things sampled to be able to describe it after the fact, and to gauge its implications for interpreting the findings.

Choosing deliberate samples, whether random or selected forces you to think about the meaning and future implications of evaluation information before it is collected. It helps focus your analysis of evaluation information once it is assembled.

The rule of sampling is to think about what you are doing when you decide whether you need to gather information from all possible sources. What alternatives are available? What reasons do you have for choosing the one you do? How do you think the kind of sample you have chosen influences the conclusions you make?

Decisions about evaluation design and sample selection have obvious implications for when and from what sources evaluation data are gathered. With these considerations in mind, we turn now to suggestions for setting up an organized plan for collecting, analyzing and reporting evaluation information.

When to Evaluate the Program

When is the best time to do program evaluation? Evaluation of the program is both ongoing and cyclical with the kind of evaluation system advocated in this manual.

Evaluation data on such things as participant performance, work placement experiences, trainee satisfaction with the program and other program components can be separately collected and examined at routine intervals by program staff.

Periodically, however, it is advisable to assemble information from the various sources of evaluation information in order to carry out an overall assessment of program performance. These overall assessments are often capped off by an official report with recommendations for change and improvement in program services.

When overall program evaluations take place depends partly on the structure of the program and its funding cycle. Some community-based programs deliver services to one group of trainees at a time. The transition from each program cycle to the next is a logical evaluation review and planning point for these programs, especially when renewed funding has to be sought for each cycle.

If funding for your program is guaranteed for more than one training group at a time, you may decide to schedule overall evaluations only every second or third cycle, in anticipation of the next funding proposal.

This possibility should be viewed with caution when the program undergoes a lot of change in client characteristics, staff and services from one cycle to the next. If major changes occur, information from different program cycles cannot be casually lumped together.

Other community-based training programs operate on a modified-continuous intake basis. This means that two or more groups of trainees may be in the program, with each at a different stage of the training process. Overall program evaluation review and planning may be more appropriately scheduled to fit the funding cycle than to coincide with the graduation of each program group.

The logistics of scheduling evaluation information gathering for programs with overlapping training groups are daunting. The program staff cannot be expected to be administering formal evaluation instruments at every turn.

A basic strategy should be to plan for the evaluation of a single program. Then see if it is possible to coordinate data collection points for successive program groups. Trainees from different groups, for example, might complete different questionnaires on the same day.

Scheduling Evaluation Activities

Worksheets 13, 14 and 15 will help you set up an organized implementation plan for your program evaluation system.

Worksheet 13 summarizes all the information gathering procedures used or planned, and their connection to major program goals or features. The planning strategy presented here is organized around the data gathering procedures themselves, rather than program goals or features. This is because a single evaluation tool is likely to gather information relevant to more than one goal or program feature.

Worksheet 13 lists headings for major categories of data gathering methods: questionnaires and ratings, interviews, observations, tests, records, logs, staff discussion and trainee feedback. Every category may not be relevant to every program. The categories are just guides to help you quickly review and summarize your methods of gathering evaluation information.

In the right hand columns, indicate in point form which goals and/or program features (see Section II.E) are covered by each data gathering procedure. These connections will already be made if you have used the forms for summarizing the existing evaluation system described in the Section II.E.

WORKSHEET # 13

INFORMATION COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS AND PURPOSES

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS	PROVIDES INFORMATION RELEVANT TO:	
(List data collection instruments/procedures by name)	PROGRAM GOALS (Abbrev.)	PROGRAM FEATURES (name)
QUESTIONNAIRES		
INTERVIEWS		
OBSERVATION		
TESTS		
RECORDS		
LOGS		
TRAINEE FEEDBACK		
STAFF DISCUSSION		

Worksheet 14 will help you write a brief summary of planned procedures for actually collecting, analyzing and reporting program evaluation information.

This summary focusses on how things things will be done, not on when. It should be organized in relation to the actual data gathering instruments listed on Worksheet 13.

The purpose of Worksheet 14 is to help you think through the actions of actually carrying out the evaluation activities before you set up a timeline. Procedural suggestions for different methods of gathering analyzing and reporting evaluation information are covered in Sections III and IV of this manual.

Worksheet 15 will help you in planning the actual schedule for instrument preparation, information collection, information analysis and reporting. It focusses on the timeline for evaluation activities related to each data gathering method, and on the allocation of responsibilities for each task.

Worksheets 14 and 15 divide data collection into two phases:

1. **instrument preparation**

2. **information collection.**

For new programs just getting underway it will be important to plan how the evaluation instruments will be developed or chosen, and build this time and responsibility into the overall plan of evaluation activities.

For ongoing programs program staff may wish to introduce changes in existing evaluation instruments or to develop new ones. This also has to be taken into account in making an implementation plan for the evaluation system. Needs for instrument development or revision will have already been identified in the process of developing a summary of the local evaluation system as described in Section II.E of this planning guide (Worksheets 11 & 12).

WORKSHEET # 14

SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES FOR COLLECTION, ANALYSIS & REPORTING - EVALUATION INFORMATION

INSTRUMENTS (List: Student questionnaire, employer interview, etc.)	DATA COLLECTION		DATA ANALYSIS		REPORTING
	INSTRUMENT PREPARATION (Who, How)	DATA COLLECTION (Who, From Whom)	DATA PREPARATION (How prepared for interpretation	DATA INTERPRETATION (How will be interpreted)	(To whom, how)

WORKSHEET # 15

SUMMARY SCHEDULE FOR COLLECTION, ANALYSIS & REPORTING EVALUATION INFORMATION
(DATES & RESPONSIBLITIES)

DATA COLLECTION INSTUMENTS	DATA COLLECTION		DATA ANALYSIS		REPORTING
(List: student questionnaire, employer interview etc	INSTRUMENT PREPARATION (WHO? WHEN?)	DATA COLLECTION (WHO? WHEN?)	DATA PREPARATION (WHO? WHEN?)	DATA INTERPRETATION (WHO? WHEN?)	To Whom? By Whom? When?

Worksheets 14 and 15 also differentiate two steps in the process of data analysis.

1. Plan procedures, responsiblities, and the timeline for preparing raw evaluation data for analysis. (i.e., arranging tables, charts, and other ways of summarizing evaluation information so that an evaluation team can study it together).

2. Plan who and how the evaluation data will actually be interpreted for the purpose of making conclusions and recommendations about the program.

WORKSHEET # 13

INFORMATION COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS AND PURPOSES

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS	PROVIDES INFORMATION RELEVANT TO:	
(List data collection instruments/procedures by name)	PROGRAM GOALS (Abbrev.)	PROGRAM FEATURES (name)
QUESTIONNAIRES		
INTERVIEWS		
OBSERVATION		
TESTS		
RECORDS		
LOGS		
TRAINEE FEEDBACK		
STAFF DISCUSSION		

WORKSHEET # 14

SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES FOR COLLECTION, ANALYSIS & REPORTING - EVALUATION INFORMATION

INSTRUMENTS (List: Student questionnaire, employer interview, etc.)	DATA COLLECTION		DATA ANALYSIS		REPORTING
	INSTRUMENT PREPARATION (Who, How)	DATA COLLECTION (Who, From Whom)	DATA PREPARATION (How prepared for interpretation	DATA INTERPRETATION (How will be interpreted)	(To whom, how)

WORKSHEET # 15

SUMMARY SCHEDULE FOR COLLECTION, ANALYSIS & REPORTING EVALUATION INFORMATION
(DATES & RESPONSIBLITIES)

DATA COLLECTION INSTUMENTS	DATA COLLECTION		DATA ANALYSIS		REPORTING
(List: student questionnaire, employer interview etc	INSTRUMENT PREPARATION (WHO? WHEN?)	DATA COLLECTION (WHO? WHEN?)	DATA PREPARATION (WHO? WHEN?)	DATA INTERPRETATION (WHO? WHEN?)	To Whom? By Whom? When?

II.G MANAGING PROGRAM EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Who is responsible?

The answer to this question has already been foreshadowed in detail in Section II.D, Organizing an Evaluation Team.

A program director may serve as the catalyst and facilitator for putting together a local program evaluation team. The evaluation model advocated in this manual, however, recommends that responsibility for planning and supervising and utilizing a program evaluation system be a local team effort.

The members of the evaluation team may vary from program cycle to program cycle, but the basic principle of involving a team of staff interested and committed to using evaluation information for program improvement remains unchanged.

The principle of joint management is most critical, and most difficult to carry out. Ideally they should collaborate when the program is delivered by training partners from more than one organization.

Written evaluation plans developed using the procedures described in Sections II.E (Focussing the Evaluation Purpose) and II.F (Planning for Information Collection, Analysis and Reporting) will provide the operational framework for supervising the implementation of a local program evaluation system.

SECTION III: METHODS OF COLLECTING EVALUATION INFORMATION

III.A	INTRODUCTION
III.B	QUESTIONNAIRES AND RATINGS
III.C	INTERVIEWS
III.D	OBSERVATIONS
III.E	TESTS
III.F	LOGS
III.G	PROGRAM RECORDS
III.H	TRAINEE FEEDBACK
III.I	STAFF DISCUSSION

III.A INTRODUCTION

Section III of the evaluation manual contains **advice about methods for collecting evaluation information**. The methods covered are typical of those used in community based training programs.

III.A Questionnaires and ratings

III.B Interviews

III.C Observations

III.D Tests

III.E Logs

III.F Program records

III.G Participant feedback

III.H Staff discussion

Each sub-section deals with a specific method of data collection. **Guidelines and procedures for developing and using each method are suggested**. Worksheets and aids are appended with each section.

A program evaluation team as described in Section II.D of this manual should play a major role in developing or coordinating the development and use of each method considered.

You and your evaluation team will have to choose from among the various evaluation methods described. There are no hard and fast rules for selecting one method over another. It depends on what you want to know, the resources you have for program evaluation, what you feel most comfortable using, and what kinds of information you find most credible and useful.

To assist you in deciding among the various methods, point form lists of advantages and disadvantages are included in the introductory discussion for each method.

SECTION III.B QUESTIONNAIRES AND RATINGS

WHY USE QUESTIONNAIRES?

- Common Uses
- Advantages and Disadvantages

SUGGESTED PROCEDURES FOR QUESTIONNAIRE WRITING

- Choosing Questions
- Writing Questions
- Questionnaire Layout

III.B QUESTIONNAIRES AND RATINGS

Why Use Questionnaires?

COMMON USES

Questionnaires are by far the most common type of evaluation instrument used in community-based training programs.

They get used for such purposes as the following:

TABLE 7

COMMON USES OF QUESTIONNAIRES

- **student evaluations of courses, instruction and the program as a whole**
- **employer assessment of trainee work placements**
- **follow-up surveys of program graduates.**

Just because questionnaires are used a lot does not mean they always work well. Community-based program staff often lament that responses to their questionnaires tell them little that they do not already know, and give little direction for change. The suggestions offered here will help you design useful questionnaires.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

There are no precise rules for when to use questionnaires. Some frequently mentioned advantages and disadvantages of questionnaire use are listed in Table 8.

TABLE 8

ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF QUESTIONNAIRES

Advantages	Disadvantages
* answers a variety of questions quickly	* superficial questions and responses
* gets uniform types of information	* inflexible questions
* easy to summarize findings	* hard to ensure valid reliable responses
* easy to survey many people	* unfamiliar way of expression for many people
* inexpensive	* impersonal

Some of the disadvantages are increased for the kinds of trainees typically served by community-based programs. People with little formal education or who have grown up outside Canada may not understand or express themselves well in questionnaires. The problem of making sure everyone understands the questions the same way increases for training groups consisting of people with varied education, cultural and language backgrounds, and whose English may not be fluent.

Where program staff have serious doubts about the ability of questionnaire respondents to uniformly understand the questions, or their willingness to express themselves in this way, thought should be given to interviews and other methods of tapping into their views.

Suggested Procedures for Questionnaire Writing

Here is a sequence of basic steps to complete in writing a questionnaire (Worksheet 16).

Procedures for Writing a Questionnaire

1. **Define purpose and information objectives of the questionnaire.**
2. **Set up team or consultative process for questionnaire development.**
3. **Draft questions keyed to information objectives.**
4. **Get agreement on questions with relevant information users.**
5. **Choose question and response formats (e.g., checklist, rating, yes/no).**
6. **Design questionnaire layout and instructions.**
7. **Get agreement on draft questionnaire with relevant information users.**
8. **Develop forms and procedures for summarizing questionnaire responses.**
9. **Try it out with selected respondents and reviewers.**
10. **Revise questions, format, instructions, etc.**
11. **Administer questionnaire**
12. **Review and revise for future use**

The program evaluation team (Section II.D) should play a major role in planning, writing and/or supervising the development of the questionnaire.

CHOOSING QUESTIONS

Key to the recommended process is that the need for a questionnaire and its content are **decided collaboratively** by program staff, not by individuals acting on their own.

The hardest part of writing a questionnaire is choosing questions that provide responses which are really useful to program staff. To do this it is important to involve intended users of questionnaire information in writing the questions. **Worksheet 17 offers some guidelines for choosing questions**.

People writing questionnaires often begin by gathering samples of instruments developed elsewhere. This is a good way to get questions poorly matched to local information needs. The basic guideline is to decide what kinds of information and questions you need first. Then review and borrow questions from other sources, if necessary.

A useful way of generating ideas for questions is to talk with a small sample of trainees, employers, instructors about the kinds of issues the questionnaire is supposed to clarify. This can be done with individuals or with small groups. This is an especially good way of getting questions that make sense to the people who are expected to fill out the questionnaire.

Lack of clarity on the types of questions needed is another source of confusion in writing questionnaires. Different types of questions suit different categories of information needs.

A common source of confusion is the failure to distinguish questions about opinions from questions about feelings (i.e. attitudes, emotions). Compare these examples taken from the same questionnaire:

> "Do you feel the training program could be changed in any way?"
>
> "How do you feel about working since your training?"

The first question is supposed to get trainee opinions about ways of changing the program. Instead it asks about their attitudes toward changing the program.

Words like "think" or "believe" should be used when opinions are desired. "Feel" should be reserved for questions like the second example, where it is clear that the program staff want information about the trainees attitudes toward work.

Worksheet 18 defines the following types of questions:

- **behavior/experience**
- **opinion**
- **feeling**
- **knowledge**
- **background**

The idea is to decide before drafting the questions whether you want information about what the respondents do, what they think, what they know, or how they feel emotionally about the program.

WRITING QUESTIONS

There are many ways of writing questionnaire items. The major distinction is between **closed** and **open-ended** response items.

Open-ended Questions

Open-ended questions require people to write out answers in their own words.

The big advantage of open-ended questions is that they provide unanticipated information from questionnaire respondents. The disadvantage is that they can be time consuming to analyze.

Truly open-ended questions allow people to respond on their own terms. The question "How satisfied are you with the program?", for example, is not truly open-ended. People will simply give responses like "very satisfied" or "pretty satisfied", which tell very little about what they truly feel about the program.

If measures of trainee satisfaction are desired, then a set of alternative responses can be provided in multiple choice or scale format.

If program staff are interested more generally in people's attitudes or opinions about the program, then specific attitudinal categories (satisfaction, interest, etc.) should not be built into the question. Just ask "How do you feel about the program?", or "What's your opinion of the program?".

A basic **guideline for open-ended questions is to avoid writing them in a "yes/no" format**.

The following question from a follow-up study questionnaire was intended to be open-ended:

> **"Are you able to apply the skills you learned from your training experience?"**____________________
> ____
> ____

As written, the question sets up a superficial "yes/no" response. They should have asked:

> **"What skills that you learned from your training experience are you able to apply?"**

A related mistake is to pose a "yes/no" question followed by a conditional open-ended response, as in this example:

> **"Was the X program helpful to you? Please explain."**

Many people will simply record the one word answer without elaboration. A better way to pose this question to ensure that all respondents contribute their thoughts is to split it in two:

> **"What parts of X program were helpful to you?"**
>
> **"What parts of X program were not helpful to you?"**

A final tip for open-ended questions is to keep the language simple and to only ask for one piece of information per question.

This example from an evaluation questionnaire for program trainers illustrates a question that is bound to result in a confusing array of responses:

> **"Please comment on the completeness/adequacy/ limitations/improvements in training equipment and resource library used in the program."**

Some respondents will talk about problems, some about improvements, some about equipment, and some about the library. No one is likely to cover the same ground. More useful and easily analyzed information could be gotten by asking separately and simply for opinions about needed improvements in equipment and in the library.

A questionnaire does not have to be made up of all closed or all open-ended questions. Mixed formats are quite common. As a general rule, however, the number of open-ended questions should diminish as the number of people surveyed increases.

Because they often involve small numbers of trainees (e.g., 15 to 30), the use of open-ended questions is valuable and realistic option for evaluators of community-based training programs.

An example of a purely open-ended course evaluation questionnaire appears on the following page.

Closed Response Questions

CLOSED RESPONSE QUESTIONS have pre-provided answers which respondents either mark or fill in.

To write them you must anticipate the possible variations in the way the question can be answered. Answers to closed response questions can be easily tallied and summarized in numerical terms. As a general rule, closed response questions should only be used when program staff have a good idea of the range of possible responses.

People working with new programs may not be able to accurately predict possible trainee or employer responses until after they have worked with the program for a period of time. Strategically, you might plan on using fairly

SAMPLE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE FORMAT

MID-COURSE FEEDBACK FORM

Your feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of the Job Skills course will help us plan ways to improve the program for you and future trainees. Please write your responses to the questions in the space provided. It is not necessary to sign your name.

1. In what ways have you benefited from this course?

2. What parts of the course have been most valuable to you?

3. What parts of the course have been least valuable to you?

4. What is helping you learn in this course?

5. What is hindering your learning?

6. What can we do to improve the course?

7. What is your overall opinion of the course so far?

open-ended instruments in the beginning cycles of the program. More structured instruments could be developed later based on responses found in these early stages. There are several **types of closed response formats**:

- **two-way questions**
- **multiple choice**
- **checklists**
- **rankings**
- **scales**

Suggestions for each of these types of questionnaire items are provided in the following paragraphs. General tips for writing questions are listed in Worksheet 19.

TWO WAY QUESTIONS ask respondents to choose from either of two responses, e.g. "yes/no", "true/false", "helpful/not helpful".

The first rule is to present people with realistic alternatives. Do not use a two-way response format if there are more than two ways to respond to the question. Consider the following example:

"Did you like your job placement?"

This question forces trainees to make a "yes" or "no" judgement about their satisfaction with the placement experience. It is more likely that there are parts of the placement they liked and parts they did not.

It would be more appropriate to rewrite this question as a pair of open-ended alternatives (i.e. "What did you like?" "What didn't you like?"), or with a scaled response (i.e. very much, somewhat, not much, not at all).

Sometimes it is just a matter of adding a "don't know", "uncertain", or "sometimes" option, as in the following examples:

> **"Do you plan to take further courses related the program?"**
>
> **yes____ no____ undecided____**
>
> **"Do you see this learning experience as fitting into the plan you made while you were in the program?"**
>
> **Yes _____ No _____ Partly _____**

The program staff writing these questions recognize trainees might not have made up their minds about additional courses, and that "plans" are often imperfect predictions of the future.

Two-way questions are sometimes used at the expense of important information. Consider the following example:

> **"Have you seen our career counselor?" Yes__ No___**

Considerably more information could have been gotten with little extra time for analysis had the question been posed as follows:

> **"How many times have you seen our career counselor?"**

This provides for much greater detail about the frequency or extent of use of the counselor than the original question.

It is hard to write two-way questions that do not suggest the desired response in the way they are worded. The following is a good example of an inadvertent leading question:

> **"Will you be able to perform your present job better as a result of skills learned in this program?"**
>
> **yes____ no_____ unsure_____**
>
> **"Please elaborate:"______________________________**
>
> ____
>
> ____

The word "better" in this question clues trainees in to the kind of response program staff would like to hear. It is likely to result in a higher proportion of "yes" responses than if the question were written more neutrally, such as:

> **"Have the skills learned in this program affected your ability to perform your present job?"**
>
> **yes_____ no_____ unsure_____**
>
> **"Please elaborate:"______________________________**
>
> ____
>
> ____

This alternative gets at the same issue in a way that provides greater insight into program effects from the viewpoint of trainees.

MULTIPLE CHOICE questions provide more than two response options. They can be used when there are several possible responses which are predictable beforehand.

For multiple choice questions, respondents choose one of the possible responses. The two rules of thumb for multiple choice questions are:

1. **Make sure all the alternatives are covered.**
2. **Make sure the alternatives provided do not overlap.**

It is a good idea to include an "other" option at the end of a multiple choice list to allow for unanticipated responses.

The trickiest part in writing multiple choice questions is to make sure that the respondents are given distinct alternatives. Take this example:

> **"Why did you take this course? (Check the best answer)**
>
> **___ to get skills that will make you immediately employable**
>
> **___ to begin re-educating yourself for a future job**
>
> **___ to learn how computers operate**
>
> **___ to find out about computers to see if you're interested in working with them**
>
> **___ to help keep your job**
>
> **___ other**

Even with the instruction to give a "best answer", this question forces people to choose from a set of overlapping responses. Program staff can easily make subtle distinctions that end up confusing respondents.

It is much less confusing for persons answering multiple choice questions to see the alternatives listed in a column, than side by side.

CHECKLISTS also present a choice of multiple responses. Respondents are not limited to a single best response. They can mark as many as apply.

Checklists are convenient for asking people about the use of specific kinds of program services or activities.

This example allows trainees to mark their interest in several kinds of job search training:

Would you like help in ___ job hunting

___ job interviewing

___ resume writing

This example lists possible reasons for seeking individual counselling from program trainers.

"Do you have any specific needs for individual counselling?" (Check those that apply to you)

_____ Daycare

_____ Housing

_____ Marital

_____ Career

_____ Stress

_____ Medical

Other (Please explain) ______________________________

____

Checklists are easy to write and use, but they do not always yield much useful information. There are three common situations which suggest the need to rethink the use of a checklist format:

(1) if most respondents mark almost all of the responses;

(2) if there are many entries in the "other" space;

(3) if the responses do not group in any clear pattern.

RANKINGS also list multiple response options. Respondents are asked to number all or a portion of them according to some criteria, such as degree of importance or frequency of occurence.

It is **very difficult** to make sense of rankings when data are combined from several respondents. Unless statistical experts are on hand, community-based program staff should probably steer clear of ranking formats on questionnaires.

An example adapted from an actual student follow-up questionnaire using a mixture of mainly closed-response questions appears on the following page.

SAMPLE
MICRO-COMPUTER PROGRAM
STUDENT FOLLOW-UP

We would appreciate a few moments of your time. We want to know how your training has affected your employment and/or educational status. This information will let us know if our courses are useful and relevant. Your reply will be kept confidential. Thank you for your support.

---

1. HOW HAS YOUR TRAINING HELPED YOU? ____________________

2. WHAT IS YOUR STATUS? (circle appropriate answer)

   Employed full-time

   Employed part-time

   Unemployed

   Continuing my education

3. WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT SOURCE OF INCOME? (circle appropriate answer)

   Employment

   Family benefits

   UIC

   Welfare

   Other (explain) ____________________

4. WHAT WAS YOUR SOURCE OF INCOME BEFORE ATTENDING THE PROGRAM? (circle appropriate answer)

   Employment

   Family benefits

   UIC

   Welfare

COMPLETE QUESTIONS 5 THROUGH 8 ONLY IF YOUR ARE EMPLOYED

5. WHAT IS YOUR PRESENT OCCUPATION? ______________________

6. HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR JOB? ______________________
____
____

7. DID YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE TRAINING PROGRAM HELP YOU GET YOUR JOB? (Circle appropriate answer)

No

Yes

IF YES, IN WHAT WAYS? ______________________
____
____

8. IN WHICH CATEGORY DOES YOUR YEARLY SALARY FALL? (check appropriate answer)

below - $4,999 _____
$5,000 - $9,999 _____
$10,000 - $14,999 _____
$15,000 - $19,999 _____
$20,000 - $24,999 _____
$25,000 - above _____

COMPLETE QUESTIONS 9 THROUGH 11 ONLY IF YOU ARE UNEMPLOYED.

9. IF UNEMPLOYED, ARE YOU CURRENTLY LOOKING FOR WORK? (circle appropriate answer)

Yes

No

10.WHAT KIND OF EMPLOYMENT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? __________
____

11.HOW ARE YOU LOOKING FOR WORK? ______________________
____

12.WHAT PROBLEMS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED IN LOOKING FOR WORK?
____
____

SCALES OR RATINGS require people to choose a single response from a range of alternatives ordered in a continuum according to some criteria, such as agreement/disagreement or satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Scales are perhaps the most common response format encountered in questionnaires developed by staff of community-based training programs. Here are some simple tips for constructing useful questions with scales.

Anyone writing a scale immediately runs into the dilemma of deciding whether to use an odd number or even number of scale items (e.g., 1 2 3 4 5 vs. 1 2 3 4). Should there be a mid-point to allow people to express a neutral response? Or should there be no mid-point so people are forced to express a clear preference toward one or another end of the scale? There is no clear answer, except to say that it depends on the beliefs and interests of those writing the questions.

A simple way out of this dilemma is to use a 6 point scale. The responses can be analyzed two ways. Based on the original scale people have to express a preference towards one side or another. Alternatively, the responses can be grouped into thirds (1-2, 3-4, 5-6), to give a mid-point and two extremes.

A related issue in the construction of scales is how many choices to put on the scale. The questionnaires collected in developing this manual included scales ranging from 3 to 10 points. Our basic advice is to keep scale size to 6 points or less. There is no real advantage to using more fine-grained scales, especially when few respondents are involved.

There is a lot of variation in the way people label scales. The commonest practices are to either label the two extremes or to assign a label to every point, as in these examples:

The instructor is prepared and organized:
1 2 3 4 5
Rarely Always

The instructors have been:
1 2 3 4 5
Poor Fair Good Very Good Excellent

A third version is to label the extremes and some of the intervening choices:

The instructor is prepared and organized:
1 2 3 4 5
Rarely Usually Always

Rate your skills in job hunting.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Don't know how Not bad Good Excellent

To avoid confusion, make sure all scale labels are clearly linked to particular points on the scale. The second example above is a clear instance of poorly positioned scale labels. A person who "Doesn't know how" to hunt for a job could circle 1, 2 or 3.

People writing scales often leave the basis for comparison implicit. This usually means that the comparison is made to the respondent's personal ideals. For example :

The course materials are:
1 2 3 4 5
too easy too difficult

The instructor presents material clearly:
1 2 3 4 5
rarely always

You should consider whether scaled responses might be made more meaningful by specifying a basis for comparison (e.g., "Compared to other instructors I've had....", "Compared to my expectations...."). This is particularly relevant to judgements requested of employers hosting trainees for work placements. Are they to rate the trainees by the same criteria they would apply to regular employees, or should they compare them to other trainees?

Alternatively, you can supply definitions for each scale point and label. Behavioral descriptors specify what counts as "satisfactory performance", or some other broad standard, as in this example:

PUNCTUALITY (WORK HOURS)

NOT ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	SATISFACTORY	GOOD	EXCELLENT
*always takes extra time during breaks	*often takes extra time during breaks	*occasionally takes extra time during breaks	*rarely takes extra time during breaks	*never takes extra time during breaks

This approach combines the multiple choice and scaled response formats. Response options can be positioned horizontally or vertically, as in the excerpts from two work placement performance evaluation questionnaires included on the following page.

Scales can be effectively combined with open-ended questions. Sometimes this is done by leaving room for open-ended comments immediately after the rating, as in this example:

1. LEVEL OF PRODUCTIVITY

EXCELLENT 1 2 3 4 5 POOR

COMMENTS: ______________________________

____

2. QUALITY OF WORK

EXCELLENT 1 2 3 4 5 POOR

COMMENTS: ______________________________

____

A common alternative is to ask for open-ended comments at the end of a rating scale. This is exemplified in the example of course evaluation form with a rating format that follows the samples of rating formats.

EXAMPLES OF VERTICAL RATING FORMATS

==

WORK PLACEMENT EVALUATION SHEET

Please circle the appropriate response.

PUNCTUALITY: PROMPTNESS WHEN REPORTING FOR WORK, WHEN RETURNING FROM BREADKS, ETC.

1. Always punctual.
2. Occasional tardiness.
3. Often late when reporting for duty, from breaks, etc.

DEPENDABILITY: THE ABILITY TO CARRY OUT JOB FUNCTIONS ACCORDING TO WRITTEN AND ORAL INSTRUCTIONS.

1. Competently carries out assigned tasks. Able to recognize and carry out additional tasks within skill are.
2. Generally carries out assigned tasks adequately.
3. Frequently does not carry out assigned tasks.

Etc...

==

EMPLOYER'S EVALUATION

(Check appropriate response)

RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

_____ Very Compatible with others

_____ Works well with others

_____ Gets along satisfactorily

JUDGEMENT

_____ Above average in making decisions

_____ Usually makes right decision

_____ Occasionally makes wrong decision

_____ Often uses poor judgement

Etc...

EXAMPLES OF HORIZONTAL RATING FORMATS

EXAMPLE 1.

EMPLOYER'S STUDENT EVALUATION REPORT

Check the appropriate level of student performance in each area.

	UNSATISFACTORY	NEEDS DEFINITE IMPROVEMENT	GOOD	ABOVE AVERAGE	OUTSTANDING
Appearance Appropriately dressed and groomed for work	☐ rarely	☐ must often be reminded	☐ needs occasional reminder	☐ almost always	☐ always
Attitude Demonstrates a willingness to learn and to pitch in when needed. Accepts suggestions and shows interest in the organization. Is pleasant and courteous.	☐ seldom	☐ sometimes	☐ usually	☐ almost always	☐ always
Communication Skills Understands and makes self clearly understood	☐ seldom	☐ sometimes	☐ usually	☐ almost always	☐ always

EXAMPLE 2.

SUPERVISOR'S EVALUATION

Please check one box for each area.

6. ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY: Amount of tardiness when reporting for work, after lunch breaks, etc.	1 Very irregular and no excuse for absences	2 Irregular, seldom with an excuse	3 Regular, good reasons for absences	4 Never misses work
7. INITIATIVE:	1 Always waits to be told what to do next	2 Usually waits to be told what to do next	3 Acts voluntarily in everyday matters & initiates activities with little dir.	4 A self-starter; asks for work to do; looks for work to do
8. CO-OPERATION WITH OTHERS:	1 Causes friction often quarrelsome; no effort to co-operate	2 Difficult to work with at times; little effort to co-operate	3 Good effort to co-operate & most contacts with others are harmonious	4 Congenial and an excellent team worker

SAMPLE
ENGLISH COURSE EVALUATION

This evaluation is to remain anonymous. The information will help us plan changes and improve the program.

Please respond by circling the appropriate response. Comments can be added at the end of this page.

1. The organization of the course is:

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
poor					**excellent**

2. The course materials are:

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
poor					**excellent**

3. The pace of the course is:

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
too slow					**too fast**

4. The text/printed materials are:

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
not helpful					**very helpful**

5. The classroom discussions are:

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
not helpful					**very helpful**

6. Is this course meeting your expectations?

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
not at all					**very much so**

7. Additional comments and suggestions. ____________________

QUESTIONNAIRE LAYOUT

Worksheet 20 lists some practical suggestions for the layout of a questionnaire.

Questionnaires are less confusing to respondents and easier to analyze when question items are arranged by topic groups and by response format (i.e., "yes/no", multiple choice, scale).

Evaluation texts often suggest placing open-ended questions after closed response questions. It really depends on what you want to know. Do you want people to express their opinions or feelings before reading a set of closed response items on the topic? Or do you want people just to elaborate on a preceding set of closed response questions?

If a questionnaire includes several sections and a variety of formats, choices have to be made about how to sequence the various parts.

It is best to begin with items that respondents are likely to find interesting but non-threatening. Really important questions should come closer to the front than to the end of the questionnaire. Routine background information about the person filling out a questionnaire can come at the end.

Questionnaires are easier to read and respond to when answer spaces are placed in similar places. This is particularly relevant to forms which have a lot of closed-ended questions.

For two-way questions it is important to arrange the answer spaces so there is no ambiguity about which space corresponds to which response. "Yes/no" responses placed vertically are clearer to interpret than when placed side by side.

Sufficient space should be left for people to respond to open-ended questions. The amount of space provided cues people to how much information is desired. The tactic of telling people to write on the back can be used to reduce paper costs, but it will increase staff time for analysis.

Questionnaires need a brief introduction. An introduction informs respondents as to its sponsors, purpose, intended use, and includes guarantees of confidentiality if needed. This can be provided orally if administered in person.

The questionnaire form itself should be titled, and the title should give some indication of its content and purpose.

The response formats should be self-explanatory as much as possible. Instructions should be kept simple. Examples may be given if you are concerned about people understanding the response format. It helps to highlight directions through underlining or bold face type.

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WORKSHEET 17

TIPS FOR CHOOSING QUESTIONS

1. ASK QUESTIONS BECAUSE THE ANSWERS WILL BE USEFUL, NOT JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE INTERESTING.

2. ASK QUESTIONS THAT ADDRESS THE SPECIFIC INFORMATION NEEDS OF THE PROGRAM AND ITS STAFF.

3. PROVIDE WAYS FOR INFORMATION USERS TO GENERATE BASIC QUESTIONS.

4. IDENTIFY GENERAL CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION DESIRED AND TYPES OF QUESTIONS NEEDED.
   (BEHAVIORS, OPINIONS, KNOWLEDGE, BACKGROUND INFO, ETC.)

5. DECIDE WHAT KINDS OF INFORMATION AND QUESTIONS YOU NEED BEFORE YOU BORROW FROM OTHER QUESTIONNAIRES.

WORKSHEET 18

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

1. BEHAVIOR/EXPERIENCE: Questions that ask what a person does or has done. Questions that elicit descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities that could have been observed had the observer been present. "If I had seen you on the work placement, what would I have seen you doing?" "How many jobs have you applied for in the last month?"

2. OPINION: Questions which ask a person to report what they think about themselves and/or the program. "What do you think about what you've accomplished?" "What do you think we should change?" "What's your opinion of...?"

3. FEELING: Questions that ask a person to describe their emotional responses to their experiences and thoughts. "How did you feel during the job interview?" "How do you feel when your supervisor evaluates you?"

4. KNOWLEDGE: Questions that ask a person to tell what factual information they have about some program related topic. "What social services agencies can you go to for child care assistance?" "Where can you get information about further training?"

5. BACKGROUND: Questions about a persons identifying characteristics -- age, education, employment history, residence, family status, etc.

---

* This table adapted from Michael Q. Patton, Qualitative Evaluation Methods. Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1980.

WORKSHEET 19

QUESTION WRITING TIPS

1. PRESENT REALISTIC ALTERNATIVES FOR CLOSED RESPONSE QUESTIONS.

2. AVOID SUGGESTING THE ANSWER IN THE QUESTION.

3. KEEP LANGUAGE SIMPLE AND JARGON FREE

4. USE VOCABULARY APPROPRIATE TO THE RESPONSE GROUP

5. SPECIFY THE BASIS FOR COMPARISON, IF NECESSARY

6. ASK FOR ONLY ONE PIECE OF INFORMATION PER QUESTION

7. TRY TO AVOID QUESTIONS OF THE TYPE "IF YES, THEN....".

WORKSHEET 20

QUESTIONNAIRE LAYOUT TIPS

1. ARRANGE ITEMS BY SUBJECT GROUPS.

2. ARRANGE ITEMS BY RESPONSE FORMAT.

3. BEGIN WITH INTERESTING BUT NON-THREATENING ITEMS.

4. PUT IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TOWARD THE FRONT.

5. END WITH BACKGROUND/DEMOGRAPHIC ITEMS.

6. ARRANGE ANSWER SPACES IN SIMILAR PLACES ON THE PAGE.

7. DO NOT CROWD THE PAGE.

8. FORMAT FOR MACHINE PROCESSING BEFORE ADMINISTERING THE QUESTIONNAIRE, IF COMPUTERIZED DATA ANALYSIS IS PLANNED.

9. PROVIDE BRIEF INTRODUCTION.

10. USE SELF-EXPLANATORY RESPONSE FORMATS OR WRITE SIMPLE HIGHLIGHTED INSTRUCTIONS.

SECTION III.C INTERVIEWS

WHY DO INTERVIEWS

- Common Uses of Interviews
- Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviews

SUGGESTED PROCEDURES FOR INTERVIEW DEVELOPMENT

- Types of Interviews
- Choosing and Developing Questions
- Recording

III.C INTERVIEWS

Why Do Interviews?

COMMON USES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews are widely used in the evaluation of community-based training programs as listed in Table 9.

TABLE 9

COMMON USES OF INTERVIEWS

- **screening program applicants**
- **with employers and trainees about work placements**
- **with trainees about their performance and opinions of the program**
- **follow-up with program graduates.**

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF INTERVIEWS

Why interviews? Interviews are a good way of getting information from people who have difficulty responding to a questionnaire, perhaps because of language or literacy barriers. They are particularly useful when program staff are interested in finding out the respondent's perspective, and when they need information about things that cannot be observed or which are not recorded elsewhere, e.g. past experiences, opinions, feelings, personal plans. Interviews are also a good way to explore complex issues and areas of program activity which are not well understood.

Some frequently mentioned advantages and disadvantages of evaluation interviews are listed in Table 10.

TABLE 10

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF INTERVIEWS

Advantages	**Disadvantages**
*** useful to get information from people with literacy or language barriers**	*** time consuming**
*** questions can be clarified to ensure well understood**	*** time consuming to analyze**
*** allows exploration of complex or poorly understood issues**	*** highly dependent on interviewing skills**
*** unanticipated findings can be pursued**	*** hard to control interviewer effects on respondent answers**
*** ensures a high response rate**	*** hard to maintain uniform interview procedures**
*** personal approach**	

Because they are so time consuming to do and to analyze, interviews are not as practical as written questionnaires when information is desired from large numbers of people.

For community-based programs serving clients with widely varying education and cultural backgrounds, however, interviews may be preferrable due to their adaptability to individual respondent differences. The use of interviews fits well with the personalized client-centered philosophies of many community-based programs.

In any case, the use of one evaluation tool does not exclude the use of others. Interviews are often used either to get ideas for questionnaire items or to elaborate on findings from previous surveys.

Suggested Procedures for Interview Development

The following procedures outline a sequence of steps to complete in developing an interview (Worksheet 21).

1. Define purpose and information objectives of the interview.
2. Set up team or consultative process for interview development.
3. Decide on interview type (i.e., informal, interview guide, standardized, focus group).
4. Decide on recording procedures (i.e., tape, notes).
5. Write questions appropriate to information objectives and interview type.
6. Decide on procedures for introducing interview to respondents.
7. Develop procedures for summarizing and reporting interview responses.
8. Get agreement on interview questions and procedures with relevant information users.
9. Try out interview with selected respondents and reviewers.
10. Revise questions and instructions.
11. Train interviewers if necessary.
12. Review and revise after each cycle of use.

The program evaluation team (Section II.D) should play a major role in planning, developing, and/or supervising the development of the interview.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are **five basic types of interviews**:

- **informal conversational interview**
- **general interview guide**
- **standardized open-ended interview**
- **standardized quantitative interview**
- **group interview**

The first three are used to get open-ended responses that communicate people's experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the program.

The fourth refers to the oral administration of surveys with pre-determined response categories.

The fifth distinguishes group interviews from the more common reliance on individual interviews. Major features of each are reviewed.

Informal Coversational Interviews

Informal conversational interviews are not set up as formal interviews. Questions are asked spontaneously during the course of routine interaction with trainees or others from whom information is desired. Respondents may not realize they are being interviewed.

While topics of interest may be specified ahead of time, the questions are not predetermined. Nor is there a set sequence for asking about targeted information objectives.

Informal conversational interviews are highly responsive to individual differences in respondent characteristics and situations.

In order to use them effectively for program evaluation, however, certain conditions have to be met.

1. **Interviewers must have ongoing contact with all respondents.**
2. **Information is gathered over time rather than in one sitting.**
3. **Time has to be set aside and procedures established for recording and summarizing responses to informal interviews.**

Major drawbacks to informal conversational interviews are:

1. **The difficulty of getting comparable information from groups of respondents**
2. **The difficulty of summarizing responses from various respondents.**

For program evaluation purposes, it is not enough to talk to people about what they are doing, thinking and feeling, if there is no plan for comparing and using information gathered from different interviewees.

Informal conversational interviews are a mainstay of many community-based training programs. Informal conversational interviews are typically used, however, for evaluating individual participant progress and needs.

Use of this kind of information for evaluating programs as a whole is not widespread. The individual focus can be extended to the program by planning simple ways of systematizing the collection and summarization of information from multiple participants over time (see Section IV.C, Working with Words).

General Interview Guides

General interview guides strike a balance between flexibility and the need for uniform types of information from groups of respondents.

The interview guide contains a list of topics to be covered. The actual wording of the questions is not predetermined. Questions can be adapted to fit individual respondents. While the guide will list topics in some sort of logical order, the sequence is flexible. The important thing is that the same categories of information are covered for all respondents. Interview guides are used as formal interview tools. They are useful for individual and for group interviews.

Interview guides serve as a checklist for the interviewer. In addition to listing the categories of information to cover, they may include suggested follow-up questions (probes) under different headings.

Because of their adaptability to people with widely varying backgrounds, general interview guides are particularly suited to participants in community-based training programs.

Appropriate use of interview guides, however, is highly dependent on the questionning skills of interviewers. It is not easy to consistently pose truly open-ended questions without having them written out beforehand.

An example of an interview guide for conducting follow-up interviews with program graduates is provided on the following page. An additional example is given of an employer telephone interview guide to assist work placement coordinators in monitoring trainee performance on the worksite. This one is adapted from one actually in use. It is designed to allow the interview to record the employers responses on the interview guide itself.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOLLOW-UP OF PROGRAM GRADUATES

1. What has the former trainee done since leaving the program? Jobs? Further training? Family? Volunteer work?

2. What is the former trainee's current employment situation? Length of time employed/unemployed? Reasons for unemployment? Job title? Job duties?

3. What changes does the former trainee anticipate in his or her current employement situation? None? Opportunities for promotion? Change in job description? Looking for new job? Further education?

4. How has the former trainee's financial situation changed since leaving the program? Change in sources of income? Change in salary level?

5. How relevant was the training program to the former trainee's current situation or future plans? Useful components? Non-useful components? Gaps in preparation?

6. How was the former trainee affected by the program in areas other than job skills? Feelings about self? Attitudes toward work? Interpersonal skills?

7. What does the former trainee think of the program? Strengths? Weaknesses? Things liked? Things disliked? Suggestions for change?

SAMPLE WORK PLACEMENT EMPLOYER TELEPHONE INTERVIEW GUIDE

WORK PLACEMENT: MICROCOMPUTER CLERK

TRAINEE NAME:

DATE:

COMPANY:

CONTACT:

WORK HABITS

1. PUNCTUALITY:
2. ATTENDANCE:
3. CONCENTRATION:
4. CAREFULNESS:
5. ABILITY TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY:
6. INITIATIVE:

DUTIES	COMMENTS
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

1. Relation with co-workers:

2. Relation with Supervisors:

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Standardized Open-Ended Interviews

Standardized open-ended interviews require interviewers to ask specific questions in a set order. Each person interviewed gets asked the same questions. Specific follow-up questions (probes) may be written in.

Although they can be written with open-ended questions, standardized interviews are not very flexible to different respondent characteristics. They also give the interviewer less freedom to explore unanticipated findings.

One advantage is that the responses are easier to summarize than for informal interviews and interview guides. Another is that there is less to worry about possible effects on the accuracy of findings due to variations in the way they are carried out.

Standardized interviews are preferred when interviewers are inexperienced or hired just to do the interviews.

An example of a possible screening interview using a standardized open-ended format is included on the following page.

Closed Quantitative Interviews

Closed quantitative interviews also use *fixed questions arranged in a set order*, but they *do not ask open-ended questions*.

Response options are pre-determined by the interview developers. As for closed-response items in questionnaires, questions may call for two-way responses (e.g., yes/no), multiple choice, and ratings (see Section 3.2 Questionnaires). Interviewees are read each question and asked to select from the given alternatives.

In effect, these are nothing more than verbally administered questionnaires using highly structured questions. Responses can be easily tallied.

Closed quantitative interviews are not a very economical use of people's time. *This type of information can usually be gotten quicker as a written questionnaire*. If there are serious considerations about the respondents ability or willingness to respond to a written questionnaire, however, an interview approach may be preferred.

Questionnaires to program graduates and employers, for example, are particularly susceptible to low response rates. An interview is harder to refuse or ignore.

Closed quantitative interviews *can be administered by telephone easier than the other types* described.

SAMPLE STANDARDIZED OPEN-ENDED SCREENING INTERVIEW FOR PROGRAM APPLICANTS

SCREENING INTERVIEW

RECRUITMENT
1. How did you find out about this program?

PERSONAL GOALS
2. What are your reasons for wanting to join this program?

3. How do you expect to use this training when you leave the program?

RELATED EXPERIENCE
4. What previous education or experience have you had in this type work?

EMPLOYMENT STATUS
5. What was your most recent full or part-time job?

6. When did that job end?

7. What kinds of jobs have you been looking for?

8. How do you go about looking for work?

INCOME
9. What are your current sources of income?

EDUCATION
10. How much school did you complete?

11. What were your strongest and weakest subjects?

12. What other course or training have you taken?

BARRIERS
13. What responsibilities do you have at home?
    - spouse
    - children or other dependants

14. What things could make it difficult for you to participate in this program?

Group Interviews

Group interviews are a practical yet under-utilized program evaluation tool in community-based training programs.

Group interviews are a useful alternative or supplement to individual interviews or surveys of program trainees, work placement hosts, program graduates and their employers.

Techniques for conducting group interviews have been most fully developed by consumer product market researchers. The buzz word is **focus groups**.

Some basic characteristics of focus groups include:

1. **A moderator leads small group discussions about specific topics of interest.**
2. **The moderator uses an outline of topics or questions to be covered.**
3. **The groups are small (8 - 12 people).**
4. **Participants are from the same group (trainees, employers, graduates, etc.).**

For market research purposes, focus group discussions are usually tape recorded. The concept and procedures for focus group research are easily adaptable to training program evaluation.

Group interviews are an inexpensive and effective way to get insight into a few specific issues. Group interaction can stimulate thinking in a way that gets more indepth data than individual interviews.

Group interviews do have some important limitations.

1. **They are not good for exploring many topics. If information is desired on many topics, it is better to use individual interviews or questionnaires.**
2. **Findings are not generalizable to other participants because the number of people involved is so small.**

The second limitation is not so severe for programs that serve small numbers of clients. It will often be possible to involve all, most or a real representative sample of trainees or other groups of respondents.

The quality of group interviews is highly dependent on the skills of the moderator. The **moderator's role** is to ensure that:

- **all topics are covered**
- **the discussion does not wander**
- **relevant unexpected leads are probed**
- **the discussion is not dominated by a vocal few.**

A final disadvantage of focus group type interviews is that they are tricky and time consuming to analyze.

A basic rule-of-thumb is that participant comments should not be treated numerically. Do a content analysis to identify categories of responses to the questions or topics raised. One does not count how many people said this or that.

Ideally, group interviews should be tape recorded and transcribed. Transcription of group discussion is time consuming. An hour of tape can easily take 8 hours of transcription time.

The alternative is note taking. Note taking is very difficult in group interviews. The moderator cannot do it. A helper is needed.

It is possible and useful for moderators to note key points on a flip chart or blackboard as they are made. If running notes are not recorded as well, summary points noted during the discussion should be gone over and elaborated more fully by the moderator and her assistants immediately following the interview session.

CHOOSING AND DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

The process and guidelines for choosing and developing evaluation interview questions is basically the same as recommended for writing questionnaires.

- **Interview purposes and information objectives should be established by a local program evaluation team.**
- **Intended users of interview findings should be involved in writing the questions.**
- **Interview developers need to be clear about what kinds of information they want from respondents before drafting the questions.**
- **Agreement among relevant information users on the interview purpose, questions and procedures is necessary before finalizing the interview tool.**
- **Interview questions should be tried out, critiqued and revised before they get used on a routine basis.**

Readers interested in a more indepth discussion of these issues can turn to Section III.C Questionnaires (and Worksheets 16 - 17) in this manual.

Worksheet 18 in the section on Questionnaires defines five types of information that people can be asked to provide:

Types of Questions

1) **behaviors/experiences**
2) **opinions**
3) **feelings**
4) **knowledge**
5) **personal background**

Leading questions are avoided in interviews as well in questionnaires.

In addition, evaluation interview questions should be neutral. This means that the questions should not sound and feel judgmental. The questions have to be posed in such a way that people feel comfortable reporting negative as well as positive information about the program.

This is partly a matter of how the questions are worded and partly a matter of how the interviewer presents herself. It is a difficult requirement when program staff do their own interviewing, since interviewees may be reluctant to say negative things about the program.

One way of signalling that it is alright to talk about the bad as well as the good is to illustrate the intent of the question by citing examples from both extremes, for example:

> **We'd like to get an idea of how you were supervised by the employer while on your work placement. Some trainees say their employers checked up on the quantity and quality of their performance on a daily basis. Others say no one ever asked them what they were doing after the first day. What kinds of supervision did you experience in the work-site?**

Had the question simply asked how they were supervised, the trainees interviewed might think that not being supervised would count against them, or might reflect badly on a kindly employer. Illustrating the alternatives makes the question more neutral.

One of the advantages of open-ended interviews is that the interviewer can follow-up initial questions with probes for greater detail or clarification. Unlike questionnaires, an interview need not be locked into the respondent's first reply.

Detail probes or follow-up questions can be built into the interview instruments. An efficient interview strategy is to ask a broad question first, such as "What things interfered with your ability to participate in the training program?", and then to follow this up with probes on items which the staff are particularly interested in (e.g., child care arrangements, transportation, money, support from family and friends).

Some items listed in the probes may get covered in the person's first response. Others can be quickly checked.

RECORDING

What is the best way to record what people say when they are interviewed?

Here we are mainly concerned with recording responses to open-ended interview questions. If a closed quantitative interview is being used there is no need to worry about getting it all down, because the interviewees responses can be coded on the spot into the pre-determined choices.

The purpose of asking open-ended questions, however, is to get at the respondents perceptions, thoughts and feelings in her own words. That purpose is defeated without an effective strategy for recording what has been said as closely and as practically as possible.

There are **three basic choices**:

1. **tape record the interview for later transcription;**
2. **take notes during the interview of what is said;**
3. **make notes of what was said after the interview is over.**

Tape recorded interviews are the least practical for community-based training programs. Transcripts of tape recorded interviews are extremely time consuming and costly to produce. An experienced typist will need four to six hours typing time to reproduce a one hour interview.

If a systematic framework for analyzing the interviews has been worked out beforehand, it is possible to summarize taped interviews while listening to them replay. This is also very time consuming, and it is not convenient to have to replay the tapes when there is a need to cross-check items or go back to the interview for additional data.

Tape recorded interviews are not a practical alternative unless a program has a big evaluation budget.

Note taking during an interview is probably the most practical procedure for staff in community-based training programs. The goal is still to get down as much of what the respondents say as possible. The reality is that the interviewer will end up jotting down key phrases more than complete sentences.

This does not mean that vital information is necessarily lost. Taped interviews always include a lot of extraneous talk and words. Interview notes tend to cut to the core of what was said, and can actually make for easier analysis.

It takes practice, but it is not impossible to keep running notes about what people are saying in interviews. Note taking in an interview is actually a collaborative process between the interviewer and respondent. After a few minutes, a rhythm tends to settle in. Both monitor the pace of the interview to allow sufficient time for the interviewer to record what's needed.

Telephone interviews pose a greater challenge for the note taker than face-to-face interviews. The respondent cannot see the recording process and time their comments accordingly. It is for this reason that closed quantitative interviews are more suited to telephone surveys than the open-ended variety.

If the interview calls for open-ended questions, the interviewer should be prepared to concentrate on capturing key phrases and words. Telephone interview notes have to be written up and elaborated immediately following the interview, while memory of what was said is still fresh.

At the beginning of a telephone interview, it is important to let the person know that notes are being taken so that periods of silence following their comments do not make them uneasy. When there is a long pause, tell the respondent what is going on (e.g., "Excuse me while I make note of what you were saying"). Rather than sounding impolite, it signals that what they are saying is valued and important.

Clarification probes are another way of buying note taking time in an open-ended telephone interview (e.g., "Let me repeat what you said to make sure I got it right").

One disadvantage of note taking for interviews is that less information can be covered in the same amount of time as when tape recording. This means you should give careful thought to what information is really needed to evaluate the program, in order to make efficient use of the available time.

A second disadvantage of note taking is that it is hard to keep track of what has been asked. This is essential so that the person summarizing the interview can tell what the person was actually responding to, and whether all the planned questions were actually asked.

One technique is to prepare an interview form with ample space for noting responses to each question. Another is to have all the interview questions listed on a one or two page form, and then simply note the number of the question in the notes when it is asked.

Key words for probes should always be inserted in the notes where asked.

A **third technique for recording interview responses** is to **take notes after the fact**. This is obviously the least reliable way to get valid interview data.

For informal conversational interviews, it may be the only reasonable alternative. It's use in formal interview sessions is not advisable, unless the interviews are short and to the point with a reasonably predictable range of responses, like a doctor's medical interview.

It depends on how much detail, how much of the respondent's own words, are desired from the interview. It also depends on what credibility program staff and other information users are willing to put in findings based on after-the-fact interview notes.

The critical guideline for after-the-fact recording is that **it has to happen as soon after the interview is concluded as possible**, particularly if other people are scheduled for interviews in quick succession.

Whether notes are taken during an interview or after the fact, they should always be written up immediately afterwards, or at least the same day. Old interview notes quickly become like archaeological artifacts, hard to interpret.

Worksheet 21 lists the following tips for "Writing up" interview notes:

- **adding unrecorded words and comments which are still remembered**
- **filling in the interview questions and probes**
- **making one's notes legible**
- **marking unclear responses to be rechecked with the respondent, if possible**
- **identifying unasked or unanswered questions**
- **making notes about how well the interview went**

It is useful to make notes to oneself about how the interview went, the respondent's reactions, willingness to talk, etc., and to write a personal judgment about how much confidence to place in the information obtained.

A decision which has to be made up front by the evaluation team is whether evaluation interview notes should be typed up to facilitate analysis, or whether those who summarize the transcripts will work from raw notes.

There are obvious personnel and time costs involved in typed or rewritten notes. You can get away with raw notes if the same person both interviews and summarizes the responses. If others are expected to participate in analyzing interview data, then steps will have to be taken to make sure that raw notes are readable and interpretable.

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WORKSHEET 21

TIPS FOR "WRITING UP" INTERVIEW NOTES

- Add unrecorded words and comments which are still remembered
- Fill in the interview questions and probes
- Make your notes legible
- Mark unclear responses to be rechecked with the respondent, if possible
- Identify unasked or unanswered questions
- Make notes about how well the interview went

SECTION III.D OBSERVATIONS

THE USE OF SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION

- Common Uses of Observation
- Advantages and Disadvantages of Observation

SUGGESTED PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING AN OBSERVATION SYSTEM

- Choosing What to Observe
- Developing Observation Instruments & Procedures
- Structured Observation Instruments
- Descriptive vs. Evaluative Observation Tools
- Naturalistic Observation Instruments
- Establishing an Observation Plan

III.D OBSERVATIONS

The Use of Systematic Observation

The purpose of observation data is to create descriptions of program settings, activities, and participants (trainees, host employers, instructors) as they are directly seen.

COMMON USES OF OBSERVATION

Observation, both formal and informal, is a common evaluation technique in community-based training programs. Table 11 lists frequent uses of observation.

TABLE 11a

COMMON USES OF OBSERVATION

- **work placement site assessment**
- **evaluation of trainee performance on technical tasks in practice settings or on-the-job**
- **evaluation of changes in trainee work habits**
- **evaluation of changes in trainee attitudes towards work and themselves.**

Most observational data are gathered and used at the individual participant level. They are rarely compared and summarized across participants for purposes of making judgements about the program as a whole.

For example, observation data may be collected on different work placement sites as part of the process of selecting individual training sites. Observation data from the various sites selected, however, may never be compared and summarized for purposes of making judgements about the site selection process or the general quality of program sites.

Our discussion of the use of systematic observation for program evaluation will **help you in three ways**.

1. **Familiarize you with the design and practice of this method of data collection.**
2. **Make you aware of the evaluation potential of observational records you may already be gathering at the level of individual clients and settings.**
3. **Make you aware of the potential for systematically recording and looking at informal observations of program staff.**

Many community-based training programs work hard to build the trainee's self confidence about their ability to learn, to get a job and to keep it. Program staff confidently report that "you can see the changes...." in trainees from the beginning to the end of the program.

Staff observations, and their evaluations of this program goal, are often informal. They remain unrecorded and unanalyzed. There is no systematic checking across participants to see how widespread and consistent the findings are.

Formalizing observations can be a way of capturing and verifying what program staff are already seeing for purposes of program improvement. It can be done without adding a tremendous burden to staff time.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF OBSERVATION

Table 12 lists some frequently mentioned **advantages and disadvantages of using systematic observation data** for program evaluation.

TABLE 11b

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF OBSERVATION

Advantages

- data highly credible
- moves beyond self-report
- reveals taken-for-granted behaviors and features of settings
- focuses on what actually happens, not on perceptions
- creates holistic portrayals of program settings, operations and effects

Disadvantages

- observation by independent observers more credible than by staff
- time consuming to write up and analyze observation records
- hard to control observer bias on what actually gets seen and recorded
- hard to interpret and control observer effects on participant actions
- focuses only on observable behaviors and things
- observed activities may not be representative of others

The big question is whether program staff and participants are reliable observers of their own operations?

Independent external observers are ideal for purposes of getting an "objective" picture of what is happening. The assumption here, however, is that many if not most community-based training programs are unable to afford the costs of contracting external observers.

The major responsibility for developing observation plans and procedures rests with local program staff. The actual collection and summarization of observation data is usually carried out by program staff, as well.

Fears about the "credibility" of staff observations are usually raised by authorities external to the actual program. Here, however, we are talking about program staff gathering information for themselves to meet their own information needs for program improvement.

If you are willing to trust your own observation data, then there is no reason not to rely on that source. If you believe there is a need for independent observers, then resources will have to be found to satisfy that need.

Suggested Procedures for Developing an Observation System

The following procedures (Worksheet 23) outline a sequence of basic steps to complete in developing a program evaluation observation system.

1. **Define purpose and information objectives for observation**
2. **Set up team or consultative process for developing observation instruments and procedures**
3. **Decide on type of observation system (structured observations, anecdotal records, field notes, expert observation)**
4. **Decide on observation plan (observers, observation focus, observation schedule)**
5. **Develop observation instruments (guidelines, forms)**
6. **Develop procedures for summarizing and reporting observation records**
7. **Get agreement on observation plan and procedures with relevant information users**
8. **Try out the observation system with selected participants/settings**
9. **Revise and finalize observation instruments and procedures**
10. **Administer observation system**
11. **Review and revise observation system after each cycle of use**

CHOOSING WHAT TO OBSERVE

The decision to set up a systematic observation system to aid in program evaluation should be made by a local program evaluation team (Section II.D). The evaluation team will develop or supervise the development of the observation plan and procedures.

Intended users of observation findings should be involved in deciding what information should be gathered and how. If local staff plan to gather their own observation data, then the persons who take on the responsibility for actually making and summarizing observation records should also be involved in designing the observation system.

The initial decision in choosing what to observe is **whether systematic observations should be made of all or parts of the program**. This decision should be made in the context of planning the overall evaluation of the program, as recommended in the Program Evaluation Planning Guide (Section II.E & II.F).

While it is possible to imagine a plan for obtaining systematic observations of all program activities, this is probably impractical. You are more likely to focus on formalizing your observations of selected parts of the program.

Formal observations may be gathered independently or in conjunction with other evaluation methods (e.g., interviews, questionnaires).

There has to be a focus for systematic observation. The process of narrowing that focus begins with the evaluation questions associated with program components targeted for observation.

Worksheet 24 presents a framework for delineating the focus of observation.

For each program component (e.g., recruitment, participant performance, instruction, work placement) targeted for observation, list the basic information objectives or evaluation questions.

Then consider what features of the program and its participants need to be observed and described in order to answer (or partly answer) those questions.

WORKSHEET #24

OBSERVATION FOCUS CHECKLIST

	PROGRAM FEATURE					
PROGRAM COMPONENT: EVALUATION QUESTION?	PHYSICAL SETTING	SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	PROGRAM ARCHIVES	PROGRAM MATERIALS	NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS	INFORMAL INTERACTION

You can check off one or more of the following categories:

1) **Physical setting** - the physical environment in which the program activities take place.

2) **Social environment** - patterns of social interaction among program participants (social groupings, communication patterns, etc.)

3) **Program activities and participant behaviors** - what people (trainees, teachers, supervisors, etc.) do in the program; how they experience it.

4) **Program materials and equipment** - the training materials and equipment utilized by participants in carrying out program activities.

5) **Nonverbal communication** - participant gestures, body language, attire.

6) **Informal interaction** - unstructured time between program activities.

The decision to focus in on one or another feature of some component of the program will be influenced by what other kinds of evaluation information are being gathered.

Once completed, the grid in Worksheet 24 wil give you an overview of the observation focus for selected program components. The initial checklist helps establish a working framework for deciding on the specific observation objectives.

DEVELOPING OBSERVATION INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES

Systematic observation for program evaluation can be carried out with

- **structured observation instruments**

OR

- **naturalistic observation instruments.**

Structured observation tools are designed to record observed activities, materials, etc., into predetermined categories of information. These include:

- **on-the-spot checklists**
- **delayed report instruments.**

Records of structured observations can usually be summarized with numbers.

Naturalistic observation instruments are used to record observed activities and related program features in narrative form. That is, the observer produces a written description of what she sees.

The main alternatives are:

- **on-the-spot observation notes (customarily referred to as "field notes")**
- **anecdotal records.**

The latter are log entries recorded and maintained for specific purposes. Logs are covered in Section III.F.

Whether you set out to record observations according to pre-defined categories of activities or to simply document what happens as it happens, it is important to form a picture of what is expected to happen first.

After you have identified the general categories of program features to be observed (Worksheet 24), check the program files to see whether up-to-date descriptions of program expectations are available for those areas of program activity.

You will need to set up a process for creating and getting agreement on such a description if none are already available.

This descriptive information should be compiled and summarized for future reference. Design your observation instruments to record activities and other program characteristics depicted in those descriptions.

Structured Observation Instruments

ON-THE-SPOT CHECKLISTS record the presence, frequency, and/or duration of specific program activities, participant behaviors or materials.

They are filled out while the observations are being conducted.

The basic procedure is to tally the number of times the events listed on the checklist occur. Three **ways of recording observations for on-the-spot checklists** are:

1. **single checks -- simply records if the behavior or other object observation occurred**
2. **frequency tally -- records each occurence of particular behaviors**
3. **duration tally -- records behaviors at specific time intervals (e.g., every 10 seconds, every minute, every 5 minutes)**

On-the-spot checklists are an effective way of assessing program implementation and participant performance. Are the things you expected to happen happening (single check)? Are they happening as often as you hoped (frequency tally)? Do they go on long enough (duration tally)?

Use on-the-spot checklists when the things to be observed are well defined, easily seen and easily counted.

The number of items on an on-the-spot checklist should not be lengthy. Some evaluation texts recommend no more than 10 items. Lengthy checklists covering several pages are awkward and confusing to use for on-the-spot observations.

DELAYED REPORT INSTRUMENTS are filled in after a period of observation has been completed.

There are two alternatives:

1. **Watch participants/activities over a specific period of time, leave and fill out**
2. **Alternate between observing and recording over a specific period of time**

Delayed report instruments are similar to questionnaires in form.

Because measures are not made on-the-spot, they are more likely to record the simple occurrence of an event, or to provide some general indication of its frequency, than to attempt an exact frequency or duration tally.

The use of delayed report instruments depends on the observer's ability to recall what she has seen. Accuracy will be better if you

-- **have specific categories or types of behaviors, activities or materials well defined beforehand;**

-- **fill them out as soon after the observation period as possible.**

Descriptive vs. Evaluative Observation Tools

Observation tools such as on-the-spot checklists and delayed report instruments should **produce descriptions of what was observed**. These descriptions are the raw material for evaluation. **Evaluation consists of comparing these descriptions to relevant program expectations and standards**.

Among the community-based training programs consulted in developing this manual, delayed report observation instruments are far more common than on-the-spot checklists.

The "observers" are typically instructors, work placement coordinators, or supervisors in work placement sites.

None of the observation instruments gathered, however, were purely descriptive. They all had some form of evaluative judgement built in to the observation tool.

This typically consists of some kind of global judgement about trainee performance in specific skill areas based on the trainer or employers' observations over an indeterminate period of time.

These examples are from a health care aide program:

Example 1	**Not Applicable**	**Unskilled**	**Acceptable**	**Skilled**
Assists with bathing				
Assists with care of hair				
Collects specimens and takes readings				

Example 2

INITIATIVE:	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
	Always waits to be told what to do next	**Usually waits to be told what to do next**	**Acts voluntarily in everyday matters & initiates activities**	**A self starter; asks for work to do looks for work to do.**

Instruments such as these are not strictly observation tools. They generalize about the behaviors observed. The number and time of the observations is not indicated. It is hard to judge how representative the generalizations about those behaviors are.

They do not just describe what the people observed did. They simultaneously record what the participants (in this case trainees) were seen to do, and make an evaluative judgement about those behaviors for specific skill areas.

The key difference between Example 1 and Example 2 is that completion of the first requires the observer to make an expert opinion. Only an expert in the health care worker field would be qualified to judge the skill level of trainees (unless their were some further specification of the terms "unskilled", "skilled", etc.).

The second example does not require an expert observer. The behavioral definitions are descriptive. Each has been rated by program staff according to its desirability in line with program objectives. But the rating is independent of the observation.

The difference between observation tools that describe and those that evaluate is important to recognize. The appeal of observation tools with built in evaluation criteria is obvious. It seems more efficient to evaluate as you go.

From a program improvement standpoint, however, an observation tool that reports the quality of performance but says little about the substance of performance (e.g., what happened, how often, for how long) is not very informative.

In the above Example 1, for example, the judgement about the trainee's skill in giving patient baths would be more meaningful if we knew how often she was observed giving baths.

Example 2 above is better for program evaluation purposes. It draws attention to the actual behaviors observed, and is less dependent on the observer's independent judgement.

In developing observation instruments for evaluating the program and participants, do not rely too much on "expert opinion".

Expert opinion can be a valuable source of evaluative judgement so long as those expressing their opinions qualify as experts in the activities being studied. Even so, expert judgements without descriptive information to back them up provide little direction for program improvement or understanding program outcomes.

Asking observers to rate participant behaviors is a very subjective process. Unless expectations for different categories of observed activity are explicitly defined ahead of time, reliance on observer judgements about the quality of participant performance is not a very reliable and valid evaluation tool.

Expert opinion only works if it is the same expert observing everywhere, or if the various experts (i.e., program staff, employers) agree to use similar criteria.

We have talked at length about the difference between descriptive observation tools and evaluative observation tools. This is because the latter appear to be a common choice in community-based training programs.

The effectiveness of these tools in providing constructive information for program improvement depends on making sure adequate descriptive observations are gathered as well.

Naturalistic Observation Instruments

Observers conducting **naturalistic observations** write narrative descriptions of what is seen and heard. The raw data of naturalistic observation are the observer's written notes of what happened.

Ideally, observation notes are recorded on-the-spot as the observed activities take place. Practically, this is not always possible. When the "observers" are program staff some of their observations take place while they are teaching, counseling, or simply chatting with other program participants.

If observation notes are not taken on-the-spot, then they should be recorded as soon thereafter as possible. Time needs to be built into the observer's work day to help make sure that happens.

It is a basic principle of naturalistic observation that you do not to trust anything to future recall.

For purposes of community-based training program evaluation, two approaches to recording naturalistic observations may be useful.

1. **Observation of particular segments of program activity (e.g., a classroom session, a counseling session, trainee performance at a work placement for a specific interval of time)**
2. **Observation of particular participant behaviors whenever they occur.**

In the first approach, you make observations of what program participants do at specific events, settings and times in the program cycle. The record describes what you saw and heard during those events.

The second approach is more appropriate to the use of anecdotal records, e.g. teacher diaries or logs. You might decide to keep anecdotal records of changes in trainee behaviors which seem to indicate improved work habits or attitudes to work. You can note your observations in participant files on a regular basis.

Good observation notes describe in concrete detail what was actually observed. The language of description is not the same as the language of interpretation.

An observer who writes that a trainee is "enthusiastic" about going on work placement is interpreting the trainee's behavior, not describing it. A description would depict the actions and words that created the impression of "enthusiasm" in the observer's view.

Someone reading the observation notes should be able to visualize what went on.

Observation notes are not completely non-interpretive. Description often includes participant comments about what has happened. Part of what you hear may be interpretations of what you see.

Participant perceptions should be marked off in quotes or brackets in the notes. When recording participant comments, it is important to use the words they use to talk about their situation.

Observation notes can also contain your reactions to what you see and hear. Analysis of naturalistic observations begins while observation is taking place. Your on-the-spot insights and interpretations are good leads for future analysis of the observation record.

The important thing is to make sure these are recorded in addition to, not in place of, a basic description of what went on. You include your reactions as part of the description. Notes on the observer's thoughts and feelings should also be marked off.

Tips for writing observation notes are listed on Worksheet 25.

There is no big secret to writing observation notes. The longer the time lapse between observation and recording, the less trustworthy the description. The less thought given beforehand to what categories of behaviors or features of the settings are important to observe, the less focussed the notes will be and the more difficult they will be to analyze.

The emphasis is always on description, not on interpretation. The more concrete detail the better.

The real disadvantage to observation notes is that they have to be written up in usable form. On-the-spot notes are unlikely to make complete sense to anyone other than the person who wrote them.

To make observation findings useable for program evaluation they have to be made accessible to review by the members of the evaluation team.

Ideally, this means that the observer will sit down soon after a period of observation and transform the raw notes into a narrative description, either written or tape recorded for future transciption. This is a time consuming ideal. Observation notes stimulate recall in far greater detail than captured in the notes themselves.

There are ways to get around the lengthy process of writing up observation notes without losing the richness of the descriptive information they contain. One way is to set up procedures for categorizing raw notes and summarizing them directly onto data summary sheets for later analysis. This type of procedure is described in Section IV.C "Working with Words".

Establishing an Observation Plan

Once you have decided what evaluation objectives will be investigated by systematic observations, and what observation methods will be used (i.e. on-the-spot checklists, delayed record forms, observation notes), you need to **set up an observation plan**.

If observation instruments have not already been selected or developed, the plan should specify

- **who will participate in their development in what ways**
- **steps that will be followed**
- **a timeline**
- **what observations will be made**
- **when, where, by what methods, and by whom**

WORKSHEET 26

OBSERVATION PLAN

1. WHAT WILL BE OBSERVED?
(activities,participants,sites,etc.)

2. INTENDED USE OF OBSERVATIONS?
A) PROGRAM EVALUATION B) OTHER EVALUATION USE

3. OBSERVATION SAMPLE (Number or % of persons, activities, settings to be observed)

A) PROGRAM EVALUATION B) OTHER EVALUATION USE

4. WHEN WILL OBSERVATIONS TAKE PLACE?

5. WHERE WILL OBSERVATIONS TAKE PLACE?

6. WHAT OBSERVATION METHODS WILL BE USED?

7. WHO WILL OBSERVE?

8. WHO WILL PREPARE AND ANALYZE THE OBSERVATION RECORDS?

A) PROGRAM EVALUATION B) OTHER EVALUATION USE

Worksheet 26 lays out a grid for constructing an observation plan.

The "what" of observation is a summary list or statement of what features of the program and its participants will be observed (see Worksheet 24).

In developing the observation plan, keep in mind the purposes the observations will serve. This will affect your decisions about the observation sample.

Will systematic observations be carried out for all participants, or just a portion of them? If observations are being planned simply for the purpose of program evaluation, it is not essential that all the individuals or kinds of activities targeted for observation be watched. Reasonable descriptions and judgements about program operations and effects can be made from a good sample of participants and activities.

Using samples is the best way to reduce the workload of collecting and analyzing observation data to manageable proportions. Different ways of selecting samples of participants and activities are described in the Evaluation Planning Guide, Section II.F.

It may be that systematic observations need to be carried out routinely for certain program components. For example, you might build structured observations in to the on-site supervision of trainees in their work placements.

These observations are used to make ongoing judgements about the suitability of specific work placement sites and about the performance of individual trainees. Observation data will be on file for each trainee and worksite.

For purposes of evaluating the program, however, it is not essential to try to summarize and analyze the data from all the files. A suitable sample of the files can be pulled and reviewed using the procedures described in the Planning Guide (Section II.F).

The practical difference between

-- **procedures used to evaluate individual participants, worksites, etc., and**

-- **procedures used to evaluate the program**

is important to keep in perspective.

A complete program evaluation system will include both. But it will often be possible to make judgements about the program without compiling and analyzing all the available records.

The observation plan format on Worksheet 26 allows you to differentiate the two possible uses of systematic observation, if necessary. If observations are to be carried out for multiple purposes, you will need to decide whether separate observation procedures are needed for each purpose.

If observations for one purpose (e.g., monitoring participant performance) are going to be used for another (e.g., evaluating the program against participant performance), then it is a good idea to consider how much of the observation data is needed for each.

The remainder of the observation plan format on Worksheet 26 is self explanatory. It is assumed here that program staff (administrators, instructors, workplacement coordinators, counselors, host employers) are likely to do most of the observing and preparation of observation records for analysis.

The final component of the observation plan specifies who will prepare and analyze the observation records. Here again it will be useful to distinguish the uses of observation data for program evaluation from other uses. It is also important to consider whether persons other than those carrying out the observations should be in on the analysis.

REFERENCES

Henerson, Marlene E., Morris, Lynn Lyons and Fitz-Gibbon, Carol Taylor. How to Measure Attitudes. Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1978.

Morris, Lynn Lyons and Fitz-Gibbon, Carol Taylor. How to Measure Program Implementation. Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1978.

Patton, Michael Q. Qualitative Evaluation Methods. Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1980.

WORKSHEET 23

PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING AN OBSERVATION SYSTEM

1. Define purpose and information objectives for observation
2. Set up team or consultative process for developing observation instruments and procedures
3. Decide on type of observation system (structured observations, anecdotal records, field notes, expert observation)
4. Decide on observation plan (observers, observation focus, observation schedule)
5. Develop observation instruments (guidelines, forms)
6. Develop procedures for summarizing and reporting observation records
7. Get agreement on observation plan and procedures with relevant information users
8. Try out the observation system with selected participants/settings
9. Revise and finalize observation instruments and procedures
10. Administer observation system
11. Review and revise observation system after each cycle of use

WORKSHEET #24

OBSERVATION FOCUS CHECKLIST

	PROGRAM FEATURE					
PROGRAM COMPONENT: EVALUATION QUESTION?	PHYSICAL SETTING	SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	PROGRAM ARCHIVES	PROGRAM MATERIALS	NON VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS	INFORMAL INTERACTION

WORKSHEET 25

OBSERVATION NOTE TIPS

1. ALWAYS TAKE NOTES

2. DON'T TRUST YOUR MEMORY

3. DESCRIBE WHAT WENT ON IN CONCRETE TERMS

4. AVOID INTERPRETIVE ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

5. RECORD PEOPLE'S COMMENTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

6. RECORD YOUR OWN REACTIONS AND THOUGHTS

WORKSHEET 26

OBSERVATION PLAN

1. WHAT WILL BE OBSERVED? (activities,participants,sites,etc.)

2. INTENDED USE OF OBSERVATIONS?
A) PROGRAM EVALUATION B) OTHER EVALUATION USE

3. OBSERVATION SAMPLE (Number or % of persons, activities, settings to be observed)

A) PROGRAM EVALUATION B) OTHER EVALUATION USE

4. WHEN WILL OBSERVATIONS TAKE PLACE?

5. WHERE WILL OBSERVATIONS TAKE PLACE?

6. WHAT OBSERVATION METHODS WILL BE USED?

7. WHO WILL OBSERVE?

8. WHO WILL PREPARE AND ANALYZE THE OBSERVATION RECORDS?

A) PROGRAM EVALUATION B) OTHER EVALUATION USE

III.E TESTS

USES OF TESTS

TESTING: BASIC CONCEPTS AND OPTIONS

- Norm and Criterion Referenced Tests
- Summative and Formative Evaluation
- Test Options

TEST CONSTRUCTION

ASSESSING TEST RELEVANCE

USING TEST RESULTS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

III.E TESTS

Uses of Tests

Many different kinds of **tests** are used in community-based training programs for a wide variety of purposes. Some of the more common are listed in Table 12.

TABLE 12

COMMON USES OF TESTS

- **Tests of basic academic skills to aid in selection of trainees**
- **Tests of trainee aptitudes for specific occupations to aid in selection of trainees and/or career counseling**
- **Tests of trainee achievement of training/course objectives**
- **Tests of trainee attitudes towards self and employment**
- **Tests of vocational interests of trainees to aid in career counseling/job placement**
- **Tests of trainee learning styles to aid in curriculum planning**

Given this diversity, we cannot pretend to give practical advice on the development and use of every type of test encountered in these programs. We have chosen to focus on the use of tests of participant performance, either for the purpose of assessing achievement or for selection into the program. These two uses of tests are common to the widest range of community-based programs, and have direct relevance to overall program evaluation.

There are other sections of this manual which contain information directly relevant to the construction of test items and procedures. The sections on Questionnaires and Ratings (Section III.B), on Observations (Section III.D), and on Records (Section III.G) are particularly relevant.

Section III.E has four parts. Part one is a general overview of basic testing concepts and terms. The presentation centers on the definition, characteristics and uses of norm referenced and criterion referenced tests. It also sketches out some options for tests of knowledge and tests of practical skills.

The last three parts contain practical suggestions for dealing with three test related tasks

- **-- test development**
- **-- assessing relevance of existing tests**
- **-- using test results for program-level evaluation.**

Additional technical references on testing are cited at the end of Section III.E.

Interviews with community-based program staff in the early stages of developing this manual revealed that many programs are essentially put together from an assortment of existing courses offered by a community agency or community college. The programs themselves are unique in terms of their client population, location, goals, range of sevices offered and their particular configurations of courses. The specific courses, however, are often borrowed and grafted on to the program, not developed from the ground up.

The question of the relevance of tests developed originally for courses taught outside the local program cannot be taken for granted. For that reason, we have included test assessment in addition to test development in the suggested procedures.

In these early discussions with community-based training program staff, it also became apparent that test results are most often used at the level of individual client performance assessment.

The systematic use of tests of trainee performance for evaluating the effectiveness of the program and locating possible needs for change is much less common. This use of testing data is a relatively unexploited source of program evaluation information in community-based programs.

Testing: Basic Concepts and Options

NORM AND CRITERION REFERENCED TESTS

There are two major categories of tests

- **norm referenced**
- **criterion referenced.**

Norm Referenced Tests

Norm referenced tests measure and compare performance in relation to norms established either for some external reference group or for the training group itself. It is not what the people taking the test have learned that is judged, rather how they perform relative to others who have taken the test.

Standardized tests of basic skills are a good example. Whether or not a person is assessed at the equivalent of Grade 10 or Grade 12 in Mathematics depends on previous testing of people with varying years of formal education to see what the average scores are for people with different educational backgrounds. These averages, or norms, then become the benchmark for interpreting the performance of subsequent users of the test. Aptitude and vocational interests tests are other common examples or norm referenced tests.

Norms can be established locally as well as externally. When a teacher decides to give an "A" to the top 15 % of the class, she is establishing a norm for scoring and interpreting the tests. Grades are given not on the basis of what the students learned, rather on the basis of how they performed relative to each other.

Local norms may also be based on longitudinal records of past performance on a test by students enrolled in a program or course.

The problem with locally derived norms is that they may be substantially lower than norms held elsewhere for similar programs or courses. In other words, the "best" students in a local program that grades trainees strictly in comparison to the performance of previous trainees, might do poorly in a similar course in another setting.

Norm referenced tests are useful for sorting people into categories, e.g., people with the equivalent of a Grade 8 and a Grade 9 education, people likely to succeed in this occupation vs. those unlikely to succeed.

They can be used for the purpose of assessing the overall performance of a course or program. Their usefulness for that purpose, however, depends on the extent to which they actually measure what is taught in the program.

The most common use of norm referenced tests in community-based training programs is for purposes of screening and selecting trainees.

When community-based agencies contract for training services with other organizations, such as community colleges, they may find that tests associated with existing courses are normed for the kinds of students that typically enrol in those courses. This situation calls for careful consideration on the part of both training partners of the relevance of these tests for community-based program trainees. A procedure for assessing test relevance is outlined later in this section.

Criterion Referenced Tests

Criterion referenced tests measure student mastery of specific learning objectives. Ideally, cut-off scores are set to distinguish acceptable from non-acceptable performance.

An alternative version assesses student performance relative to specific objectives without setting a minimum standard of acceptable mastery. That approach, however, leaves the question of what constitutes "success" open to debate at the level of individual performance and of the program as a whole.

Criterion referenced tests are the preferred and most common type of test for measuring student learning in occupational training programs. They provide specific information about what trainees have learned during and at the end of the program. When that type information is compiled for all participants, it can provide valuable leads to areas of the program in need of improvement.

Criterion and norm referenced tests are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is possible to develop "norms" for criterion referenced tests based on cumulative records of repeated administrations to a similar student population.

The problem in doing that for small community-based organizations is that local program norms may not carry any weight outside the organization.

In terms of "selling" the program and its trainees to prospective employers (and funders), it seems wiser to focus on better ways of measuring and communicating information about what trainees actually accomplish in the program, not on their success relative to each other.

SUMMATIVE AND FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Tests serve a formative purpose when they are used to measure participant progress during the program at the end of a unit or sequence of instruction.

This information is used to help the teacher and student identify needs for improvement while the program is still in process. The student may need extra practice in some area. The teacher may need to modify her instructional plans. If similar problems show up for a number of students, they may indicate areas of general weakness in the course or program. Corrective action can be taken while the program is in process.

Tests serve a summative purpose when they are used to measure the program's overall impact on trainee achievement at the end of the program.

This kind of information can also be used for program improvement, but the improvements introduced will be of benefit mainly to future client groups.

TEST OPTIONS

Different kinds of tests are associated with different kinds of learning objectives. Tests of knowledge are usually of the pencil and paper form. People are challenged to recall what they know on paper. Test items can take various forms: multiple choice, true/false, matching, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, or essay.

Tests of work related skills (psychomotor performance) take other forms. Work samples are a common means of evaluating skills peformance. Trainees perform a work related task in a simulated work situation or on-the-job.

The test can focus on the process, i.e., what they are doing while carrying out the task. Or they can focus on the product, i.e., the result of what they did. Checklists and rating scales are the usual devices for scoring participant skill performance.

Another skill testing method is to measure participant performance on critical incidents. Critical incidents are essential tasks for specific jobs that a person can either do well or poorly. These are defined with trainee employers, for example, on work placements. The supervisor rates the trainee's performance for each critical incident.

This does not cover the full spectrum of types of achievement tests, but it does lay out some of the basic distinctions and options.

Test Construction

Teachers in community-based training programs are often challenged to develop their own formative and summative tests of trainee performance. The intricacies of test development go beyond the scope of this manual. We can, however, chart out some basic guidelines and procedures for test development in Table 13.

These guidelines provide a framework for planning test development at the local level. They indicate the scope and sequence, if not the detail, of what needs to be done.

Test development for specific courses would obviously involve the teachers responsible for delivering those courses. The strategy proposed here does not assume, however, that test development is something that teachers should do on their own.

Many of the tasks and judgements stipulated in the guidelines go beyond the responsibility of individual teachers (e.g., establishing performance objectives, assessing the appropriateness of locally developed objectives and tests for specific occupations and client groups, setting up procedures for monitoring program implementation and for using test results for program evaluation). The overall test development process should be managed by a local program evaluation team (see Section II.D).

TABLE 13

GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR TEST DEVELOPMENT

1. Decide on purpose, focus and expected uses of test and test results.

2. Research and define skills/knowledge competencies relevant to program goals.

3. Define performance objectives keyed to identified competencies.

4. Get agreement on appropriateness and attainability of performance objectives for program area and clients with relevant program staff.

5. Map the "fit" of curriculum content to performance objectives.

6. Select testing strategy/format appropriate to performance objectives, clients and program resources.

7. Develop multiple test items for each performance objective.

8. Assemble testing instrument/procedures.

9. Get agreement on appropriateness of testing methods to performance objectives and clients with relevant program staff.

10. Develop forms/procedures for summarizing test results and making relevant comparisons.

11. Set up strategy and procedures for documenting program implementation.

12. Administer tests and interpret results.

13. Review and revise test content and procedures on a cyclical basis.

What is proposed is not simply the development of a test, rather **the development of a test** that is

- **keyed to program objectives**
- **appropriate to the occupational focus of the program**
- **appropriate to participating trainees**
- **useful for purposes of evaluating effectiveness of the program as a whole.**

The utility of tests of trainee performance in evaluating emplyment related training programs is critically dependent on their relevance -- their relevance to the performance objectives of the program, their relevance to what is actually taught in the program, and their relevance to the characteristics of the trainees.

On the issue of performance objectives, it is critical that program staff (administrators, instructors, sponsors) agree that the stated objectives are important to the program's occupational goals.

They must also agree that these objectives can be realistically achieved with the scheduled training activities and timeline, and the type of trainees.

A test that measures irrelevant or unrealistic performance objectives will aid little in the evaluation of a program for program improvement.

In order to make the fullest use of test results for purposes of program evaluation, it is important to make sure that information about what parts of the planned program were actually delivered, or not delivered. This is what is referred to as "monitoring program implementation". Without that kind of information to draw on, program staff will have difficulty judging whether poor performance levels result from a lack of instruction, or from instruction that did not have the expected impact.

Assessing Test Relevance

For many users of this manual, the basic issue will not be the development of tests, rather assessing the relevance and appropriateness of existing tests.

The existing tests may have been locally developed at some time in the past. They may be components of courses purchased from training partners. They may be built into texts and other curriculum materials. In any case, they may never have been rigorously examined to check their fit with program objectives, characteristics and clients.

The following steps (Worksheet 27) outline a process for determining the appropriateness of an existing testing instrument.

Suggested Steps for Assessing the Appropriateness of Existing Tests

1. **Set up a team of staff to review existing (or potential) tests.**
2. **Assemble information about relevant performance objectives and records of program implementation.**
3. **Identify and list official (and non-official) program performance objectives.**
4. **Rate comprehensiveness of test for relevant performance objectives.**
5. **Rate credibility of test items for performance objectives.**
6. **Rate implementation fit of test items to program as actually delivered.**
7. **Rate client fit of test items to training group.**

Worksheet 28 at the close of this section will help you assess the relevance of tests.

The process does not assume that "official" performance objectives are necessarily the only trainee outcomes youwill want to measure with their tests. Thus, the worksheet provides for the enumeration of non-official objectives which are also local priorities. Of course, it may be that an existing test item does not correspond to any identifiable program performance objective. This information will be recorded as well.

COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE TEST refers to its coverage of the performance objectives it is supposed to measure. Effective tests do not rely on single measures of each objective. Single measures are highly unreliable indicators of performance. So comprehensiveness is not just an either/or question. The Worksheet distinguishes between no coverage at all, low coverage (1 item) and multiple coverage (2 or more items).

CREDIBILITY requires you to make a subjective judgement whether each test item is an accurate and believable measure of the objective it is keyed to.
If you are comfortable with your expertise in the subject matter and field of training, you can draw on your own knowledge and experience. You might wish to consult external "experts" for an independent judgement, as well.

IMPLEMENTATION FIT requires you to judge how well test items correspond to the training curriculum as actually delivered. This is the rationale underlying the instruction in step two to assemble program implementation records (e.g., lesson plans, student assignments, etc.).

CLIENT requires a subjective judgement as to whether the content and format of the test item is appropriate to the trainees the program serves.

The test assessment process and Worksheet 28 are designed to stimulate analysis and discussion of some of the key issues for determining the relevance of achievement tests to their programs. The process and accompanying discussion should culminate in a decision to do something about the tests examined. Worksheet 28 lists four options:

(1) modify the existing test

(2) develop/select a new test

(3) leave it as it is

(4) look for alternatives to a test.

Using Achievement Test Results for Program Evaluation

The final part of our recommendations on test use in community-based training programs is not another list of procedures. It is simply a call for increased use of existing achievement testing records for the purpose of program evaluation.

Formative and summative achievement test data are routinely used in the assessment of individual client performance. The potential for systematic examination of achievement test data across the program is great. As with other program records (see Section III.G), however, test results cannot provide answers to questions that have not been asked.

The advice for a local evaluation team is to think creatively about which program evaluation questions are relevant to available testing data. Decide what kinds of comparisons could usefully be carried out.

The obvious choice is comparison of test results to program performance objectives. This goes beyond the customary practice of reporting final grades. The purpose of using test results for program evaluation is not just get a general judgement of overall performance. Test results can be used to delve into program content and processes to help figure out what parts of the program are working well and which ones are not.

There are any number of comparisons and relationships that can be investigated by simply arranging and displaying test results. Some obvious possibilities include:

- **comparison of test results to program performance objectives**
- **comparisons to past performance (for the same training group and/or for different training groups)**
- **comparisons between different courses**
- **comparisons to group norms.**

Test results need not be looked at simply as a measure of trainee performance. Test results are a mirror of the program. Trainee performance measures reflect on the appropriateness of program content and instruction, and on the appropriateness of tests chosen or developed to measure achievement.

It is only when program staff orient themselves to using tests to learn about the program, not just for judging participants, that the use of achievement test data for program evaluation can flourish.

REFERENCES

Morris, Lynn Lyons and Fitz-Gibbon, Carol Taylor. How to Measure Achievement. Program Evaluation Kit, Center for the Study of Evaluation, University of California, Los Angeles. Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1978.

Wentling, Tim L., and Lawson, Tom E. Evaluating Occupational Education and Training Programs. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975.

WORKSHEET 27

STEPS FOR ASSESSING THE APPROPRIATENESS OF EXISTING TESTS

1. SET UP A TEAM OF STAFF TO REVIEW EXISTING (OR POTENTIAL) TESTS.
2. ASSEMBLE INFORMATION ABOUT RELEVANT PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES AND RECORDS OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION.
3. IDENTIFY AND LIST OFFICIAL (AND NON-OFFICIAL) PROGRAM PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES.
4. RATE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF TEST FOR RELEVANT PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES.
5. RATE CREDIBILITY OF TEST ITEMS FOR PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES.
6. RATE IMPLEMENTATION FIT OF TEST ITEMS TO PROGRAM AS ACTUALLY DELIVERED.
7. RATE CLIENT FIT OF TEST ITEMS TO TRAINING GROUP.

WORKSHEET # 28

ASSESSING TEST RELEVANCE

TEST (NAME): ______________________________

COURSE: ______________________________

RELEVANT PERFORMANCE	TEST ITEMS	COMPREHENSIVENESS	CREDIBILITY	IMPEMENTATION FIT	CLIENT FIT
OBJECTIVES	(List item #'s by Objective)	Null = Not covered Low + 1-2 items Hi = 3 + items	*Acceptable *Unacceptable *Uncertain	*Taught *Not Taught *Uncertain	*Acceptable *Unacceptable *Uncertain

RECOMMENDATIONS(S):
(CHECK ONE) –

- Modify Test
- Develop/Select New Test
- Leave as is
- Look for alternative to testing

EXPLAIN:

SECTION III. F LOGS

WHY KEEP LOGS?

- Uses of Logs
- Advantages and Disadvantages of Logs

PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING LOGS

- Types of Logs
- Planning to Use Logs for Program Evaluation
- Tips for Using Logs for Program Evaluation

SECTION III.F LOGS

Why Keep Logs?

USES OF LOGS

Logs, anecdotal records, diaries, journals. These are names for different ways individual program participants (instructors, trainees) can record what they are doing, thinking, feeling or observing at regular intervals during a program. For convenience sake, "log" is used here as the generic terms for these types of records.

Log keeping by instructors and trainees is not unusual in community-based training programs. It is rare, however, that information from participant logs is reviewed and used for program evaluation.

Instructors often make written notes about each trainee's performance, progress and/or factors influencing their performance (e.g., family issues, money problems) on a regular basis. These anecdotal records are kept in each trainee's file. The instructor uses them to plan supportive interventions during the program and to help make an overall assessment of the trainee's performance upon completion.

Trainees are often asked to keep personal journals during the program. Journal writing is used as a learning tool to help trainees become more conscious of how they are reacting to their environment. The focus is usually on getting them to record personal feelings and reactions to their experiences in the program. They may be encouraged to make plans for overcoming personal obstacles, and to reflect in later journal entries on their progress in dealing with those obstacles.

Journal writing usually takes place in a Life Skills component of community-based training programs. Often it is integrated with English upgrading as a writing exercise. Trainees may or may not be asked to turn in or discuss what they write with program staff.

Whether designed as a learning activity for trainees or as a student evaluation technique for teachers, the content of logs used in community-based training programs is usually dealt with only at the level of individual participants. In our consultations with program staff while developing this manual, we found no instances where records of participant logs were being summarized to assist with program evaluation.

The purpose of this section is

1. **to make program staff aware of the possibility of using participant logs for program evaluation;**
2. **to offer some suggestions about when and how to use them.**

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO USING LOGS

Some advantages and disadvantages to using logs for program evaluation are listed in Table 14:

TABLE 14

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO LOG USE

Advantages	Disadvantages
* Useful to document individualized activities and outcomes	* Participants may not see relevance
* Useful to document unpredictable activities and outcomes	* Hard to motivate people to keep up and turn in
* Useful to document varied activities in multiple settings	* Hard to analyze if too open-ended
* Records participant experiences during implementation, not just at end	* Raises questions of confidentiality

Procedures for Developing Logs for Program Evaluation

The following procedures outline a sequence of basic steps to complete in developing log keeping methods for program evaluation (Worksheet 29). The procedures and accompanying worksheets can be used to adapt existing log practices or to initiate new ones.

1. **Define the evaluation purpose and information objectives of log.**
2. **Define the personal payoff for log writers.**
3. **Set up a team or consultative process for log development.**
4. **Decide on log type (i.e., diary/journal, anecdotal records, structured log).**
5. **Develop log format and materials.**
6. **Develop procedures for summarizing and reporting log content.**
7. **Set up schedule for log completion and use.**
8. **Get agreement on log format and use with relevant information users.**
9. **Field test log format and procedures.**
10. **Review and revise after each cycle of use.**

The local program evaluation team (Section II.3) should play a major role in planning, developing, and/or supervising the development of log keeping systems for program evaluation.

TYPES OF LOGS

The emphasis here is on narrative logs.

It is, of course, possible to develop closed-response checklists or multiple choice type formats to get numerical records of predictable participant activities at scheduled intervals. Trainees, for example, might be asked to complete a checklist of work activities performed after each day or week on work placement. Program staff interested in developing this kind of log should review the suggestions for questionnaires (Section III.B) and observations (Section III.C) of this manual.

The three main types of narrative logs are:

1. **personal diaries and journals**
2. **anecdotal records**
3. **structured logs.**

Personal Diaries and Journals

Personal diaries and journals are most commonly used as a personal learning tool with trainees in community-based programs. They are distinguished by their open-endedness and their emphasis on personal reflection. Participants are only given broad directions or guidelines about what to write. They are used less to document participation in program activities than to get people in touch with their feelings about the program and themselves, and what they can do to take control of their situation.

For program evaluation purposes, the main drawbacks of personal journals are the following:

- **they are hard to summarize and analyze because they are so open-ended;**
- **they are likely to contain personal information that participants prefer not to publically disclose.**

We are not suggesting that personal journals should be set aside for more structured and less personal logs. It will, however, be more difficult to use open-ended personal journals as a program evaluation resource because of the problems they present for data summary and confidentiality.

Anecdotal Records and Structured Logs

Anecdotal records and structured logs are less open-ended and less introspective than personal diaries. Writers of these kinds of logs may report on their own activities, or they may report on their observations of others. The differences between the two are matters of degree.

Anecdotal records are less fixed in terms of the kinds of information to be recorded and the frequency of collection. Either may focus on

- **events covering a specific time period (the last week, the first quarter of the program), or**
- **a specific activity (a class assignment), or**
- **particular incidents (a reported problem in the workplace or at home, a visible change in trainee work habits).**

The term anecdotal records usually refers to incidental or summary observations about students written up by teachers.

Structured logs can refer to records maintained by students or program staff members.

Anecdotal records and structured logs are set up to record specific categories of information. At a minimum the log writer should have a set of guidelines or instructions about the kind of information to include. Log entries may be recorded on special log sheets which itemize the kinds of information to be reported.

The Program Manager for one of the programs consulted in developing this manual, for example, used the format illustrated on the following page for making anecdotal records about trainee experiences on work placements.
Her notes were based on routine contacts with the employer

and her own informal observations and conversations with trainees. These anecdotal records were in addition to periodic formal performance appraisals using a standardized rating form.

SUPERVISOR REPORT

PLACE: Training Place Host = TPH
Program Workshop = PW

NAME: Jane Doe

DATE	PLACE	COMMENTS:
20/11/86	TPH	The agency supervisor feels everything is going well. She feels Jane is adjusting well to her clients. Both the agency and myself found her to be punctual and very friendly towards the staff and the clients.
21/11/86	PW	During the group discussion, Jane shared her experiences about training placement week two. She seems very content at the placement agency. Jane expresses joy due to the fact that she can handle certain client "situations".
25/11/86	TPH	During my meeting with the agency supervisor, she expressed some concern regarding the fact that she might not be able to expose Jane to the variety of clients she had wished to.

Etc...

Written reports by trainees are one kind of structured log for trainees used in some community-based training programs. As part of their work experience training, for example, trainees in one of the programs consulted in developing this manual are required to submit monthly reports covering the following topics:

1. Your name and name of workplace
2. Your position.
3. The skills you are using.
4. The personal skills you are using.
5. The work skills you would like to develop or improve on.
6. The personal skills you would like to develop or improve on.
7. Assignments you have worked on this month.
8. Your overall feelings about your workplace (including how you are personally "fitting in").
9. Description of the training and type of supervision you were given this month.
10. Description of any tasks you would like to be doing at your workplace that you are not already doing.
11. Any other comments.

Anecdotal records and structured logs are easier than diaries to use for program evaluation because the content is more uniform and structured across participants.
Special issues of confidentiality arise when they record personal judgements about other people associated with the program.

PLANNING TO USE LOGS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

Asking teachers, counselors, and trainees to keep logs solely for the purpose of program evaluation is unlikely to work out unless something is done to make the logs personally useful to those expected to fill them out.

If logs are already being used for such purposes as personal learning and monitoring individual client progress, it is simply a matter of figuring out how that information could be used for program evaluation. The section in this manual on using existing records has some useful suggestions (Section III.G).

The key thing to keep in mind is that existing logs should be reviewed with specific evaluation questions in mind.

The purpose is not to summarize the entire contents of the logs, rather to see what can be learned from them in response to specific questions. The evaluation question will create a framework for comparing information across participants, and for de-personalizing the information pulled from individual logs.

Where large numbers of participants are involved, you may wish to draw a sample rather than review all the logs (see sampling suggestions, Section II.F).

If you decide to introduce a log keeping system in order to gather information for program evaluation, then you will need to think of ways to make log keeping personally relevant to the people that fill them out. Without a personal motive, log keeping will be felt as a burden. The quality and consistency of log entries will slip.

Worksheet 30 presents a simple outline for planning the use of a log keeping system for program evaluation.

TIPS FOR LOG USE IN PROGRAM EVALUATION

Worksheet 31 presents some specific tips for developing and using logs for program evaluation.

If logs are going to be used for program evaluation then it is important that the people writing them use a standard format. Analysis will be greatly simplified if log entries cover predictable categories of information in a predictable arrangement.

This can be done by providing simple instructions for what should be covered in what order, or by supplying log sheets with topic headings. This makes them easier to review and summarize. It does not make the log entries less open-ended.

Log formats should be familiar as well as simple. The best way to ensure that is to ask participants to help develop the format.

Some strategies to make logs personally important to the persons filling them out include:

- **setting aside time for individual or group discussions based on log entries;**
- **making copies so that participants are not deprived of their personal record;**
- **giving oral or written feedback to participants on their log reports.**

Log keeping and use has to be built into the schedule of routine program activities. It should not be an add on for people to do on their own time or at the expense of other program responsibilities. There needs to be a regular time set aside for making log entries, and regular schedule for gathering and summarizing log records for program evaluation.

Make plans and procedures for summarizing the content of logs in relation to specific evaluation questions in advance. Sections IV.C - IV.D of this manual suggest ways of summarizing and making conclusions with narrative data.

Because they almost always contain information of a personal and private nature, guidelines for dealing with issues of confidentiality in using logs needed to be worked out and clearly communicated to those who do the logs.

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WORKSHEET 29

PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING LOGS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

1. DEFINE THE EVALUATION PURPOSE AND INFORMATION OBJECTIVES OF THE LOG.

2. DEFINE THE PERSONAL PAYOFF FOR LOG WRITERS.

3. SET UP A TEAM OR CONSULTATIVE PROCESS FOR LOG DEVELOPMENT.

4. DECIDE ON LOG TYPE (I.E., DIARY, JOURNAL, ANECDOTAL RECORDS, STRUCTURED LOG).

5. DEVELOP LOG FORMAT AND MATERIALS.

6. DEVELOP PROCEDURES FOR SUMMARIZING AND REPORTING LOG CONTENT.

7. SET UP SCHEDULE FOR LOG COMPLETION AND USE.

8. GET AGREEMENT ON LOG FORMAT AND USE WITH RELEVANT INFORMATION USERS.

9. FIELD TEST LOG FORMAT AND PROCEDURES.

10. REVIEW AND REVISE AFTER EACH CYCLE OF USE.

WORKSHEET 30

LOG USE PLAN FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

1. WHO WILL KEEP A LOG? (INSTRUCTORS, TRAINEES, ETC.)

2. WHAT PURPOSE WILL LOGS SERVE FOR THOSE WHO WRITE THEM?

3. WHAT PURPOSE WILL LOGS SERVE FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION?

4. WHAT INFORMATION WILL THE LOGS CONTAIN?

5. WHAT WILL THE LOGS LOOK LIKE? (MATERIALS, FORMAT)

6. WHAT INSTRUCTIONS WILL LOG WRITERS BE GIVEN?

7. HOW OFTEN WILL ENTRIES BE MADE?

8. HOW OFTEN WILL LOGS BE COLLECTED? BY WHO?

9. HOW WILL LOG CONTENT BE SUMMARIZED FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION? BY WHO?

10. HOW ARE LOG WRITER RIGHTS TO CONFIDENTIALITY SATISFIED?

WORKSHEET 31

TIPS FOR LOG USE IN PROGRAM EVALUATION

1. SELECT AN EASY TO USE FORMAT.
2. SELECT A FAMILIAR FORMAT FOR LOG WRITERS.
3. PROVIDE LOG SHEETS/NOTEBOOKS WITH INSTRUCTIONS.
4. FIND WAYS TO MAKE LOGS PERSONALLY USEFUL TO LOG WRITERS.
5. GIVE FEEDBACK TO LOG WRITERS ON LOG REPORTS.
6. SCHEDULE REGULAR TIME FOR LOG ENTRIES.
7. MAKE SURE LOG ENTRIES ARE DATED.
8. SET UP SCHEDULE FOR COLLECTING LOGS.
9. SCHEDULE TIME FOR SUMMARIZING AND REVIEWING LOG REPORTS.

SECTION III.G RECORDS

RECORDS FOR WHAT?

PROCEDURES FOR USING PROGRAM RECORDS

- Making a Records Inventory
- Fitting the Records for Accountability
- Fitting the Records for Program Evaluation
- Confidentiality

III.G RECORDS

Records for What?

All human services programs keep records of one sort or another. This section concerns the use of program records for **program accountability** and **evaluation**.

The overall emphasis in this manual is on carrying out program evaluation for the purpose of local program improvement. As described in the Evaluation Planning Guide (Section II), however, the manual recognizes that other program information needs have to be dealt with as well. Accountability to funders and other organizations is one of these. The ideal program evaluation system will cover the accountability and the program improvement needs of community-based training programs.

Staff members of community-based training programs often refer to the records and reports they prepare for funding agencies as their "program evaluation". Here, we use the term "**accountability**" for the act of submitting information about program operations in compliance with the demands of supervisory authorities and other external organizations. Local program staff may or may not actually use this information for purposes of evaluating program accomplishments and needs for change.

We use the term "**program evaluation**" for the collection and use of information about program operations and impact by program staff to maintain and improve the program.

Program records in any organization are typically created and maintained for purposes other than local program evaluation. Some basic recordkeeping purposes are listed in Table 15.

TABLE 15

BASIC PROGRAM RECORDKEEPING PURPOSES

1) **Accountability to other organizations (e.g., funders, regulatory agencies, training partners, parent agencies)**

2) **Program administration (e.g., financial records, personnel records, strategic planning)**

3) **Client records (e.g., client characteristics, use of services, performance)**

4) **Public relations**

Even records ostensibly kept for purposes of program evaluation are often not used to full advantage.

The basic strategy is to adapt existing or planned records to make them responsive to the program's information needs for evaluation, not to add on new recordkeeping forms and procedures.

In summary, the focus of this section is not how to create program evaluation records, rather how to make use of program records for program evaluation.

Suggested Procedures for Using Program Records

The following procedures outline a sequence of **steps to follow in using program records for accountability and evaluation** (Worksheet 32).

The same records may be drawn upon for both purposes. The kinds of information needed and the way it has to be presented and used, however, are likely to differ. For that reason we recommend considering them as separate categories of information needs.

Accountability is listed first because accountability to funders and supervisory authorities is a basic housekeeping task necessary to the survival of externally funded projects like community-based training programs.

PROCEDURES FOR USING PROGRAM RECORDS

1. Make a list of available records, their content and use.

ACCOUNTABILITY

2. Compare this list to information requirements for accountability.
3. Identify needs for modification or addition to existing recordkeeping procedures.
4. Revise recordkeeping procedures if needed.
5. Plan for record compilation and summarization.
6. Assemble and summarize records as planned.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

7. Compare list of available records (Step 1) to program evaluation objectives/questions.
8. Decide how records to be used for program evaluation.
9. Specify needs for modification or addition to existing recordkeeping procedures.
10. Revise recordkeeping procedures if needed.
11. Plan for record compilation and summarization.
12. Assemble and analyze records as planned

The aim is to develop a single set of program records which can serve multiple purposes. In order to do this, it will probably be necessary to develop forms and procedures for transferring information from the raw records into formats specific to the planned uses for accountability and evaluation. This approach is more efficient than creating separate sets of records for different purposes.

MAKING A RECORDS INVENTORY

The first step is to **make an inventory of existing or planned records**.

This is a useful starting point even for new programs still at the stage of initial planning and development. Forms to be completed or maintained for program funders and other authorities may already be on hand. Program proposals, plans and descriptive materials will be on file. Program developers and/or staff will already have ideas about the kinds of records they want to keep.

The idea is to begin by charting out what kinds of records program staff think they need to maintain. This creates a practical framework for adapting the recordkeeping system to specific information needs for accountability and program evaluation.

Recall that the aim is not to set up a distinct recordkeeping system for program evaluation, rather to set up ways of using the program's recordkeeping system for evaluation.

Many different kinds of records are likely to be found in the files of community-based training programs. Some common categories of records are listed in Table 16. The list is illustrative, not exhaustive.

Worksheet 33 lays out a framework for making an inventory of existing and planned program records, and for summarizing their current content and use. Completion of this outline, or something like it, lays the groundwork for examining the records system vis a vis accountability requirements and evaluation needs.

Worksheet 33 lists some major categories of program records. Program staff using the form should fill in specific types of records relevant to each heading. A brief one or two sentence statement that identifies the content of those records is added. A similarly brief statement of the actual or planned uses of those records is also written in.

After a program records inventory has been developed once, it can simply be revised as modifications in the records system are introduced.

TABLE 16

COMMON TYPES OF PROGRAM RECORDS

- participant background (age, marital status, kids, education, work history, home, languages, income,etc.)
- program proposals & plans
- program contracts w/ funders & other agencies
- financial records
- curriculum documents (course outlines, objectives, handouts, tests, texts, etc.)
- enrolment & attendance records
- trainee performance records
- trainee completion records
- personnel files
- records of contacts w/ employers
- records of contacts w/ government & social agencies
- minutes of staff meetings
- minutes of board meetings
- public relations information
- past evaluation & accountability reports
- research reports (market surveys, needs assessments, govt. reports, etc.)

WORKSHEET # 33

PROGRAM RECORDS INVENTORY

RECORD TYPE/NAME	AVAILABILITY (EXISTING, PLANNED)	CONTENT SUMMARY	CURRENT USE
PROGRAM PLANS: (e.g., proposals, implementation, plans)			
PROGRAM CONTRACTS: (e.g. government, training partners)			
ORGANIZATION POLICIES/CHARTS:			
RECRUITMENT RECORDS:			
TRAINEE FILES: (e.g. personal background, performance, attendance, completion records)			
CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS: (e.g., course outlines, objectives, lesson plans, tests, handout materials)			

FITTING THE RECORDS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Worksheet 34 presents a way of analyzing a program's information needs for accountability, and of linking those needs to program records.

Community-based training programs are usually subject to demands or requests for information from many different sources. These include a variety of organizations external to the community agency sponsor, as well as sources within the agency structure itself.

TABLE 17

SOURCES OF ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

- **government offices that fund or regulate the programs**
- **non-governmental funding agencies (e.g., industrial training committees, United Way, client group associations, private foundations)**
- **training program partners (e.g., community colleges, school boards)**
- **local community groups**
- **officials of sponsoring community agencies**
- **local boards and advisory committees that oversee the program**

Worksheet 34 lays out a format for identifying

- **who requires information about the program (other than the program staff)**
- **what kinds of information are required**
- **how those information needs are currently met by program records.**

WORKSHEET # 34

RECORD KEEPING FOR ACCOUNTABLILITY

WHO REQUIRES INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM?	SOURCES OF INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS	TYPES OF INFORMATION REQUIRED	LINKAGE TO CURRENT RECORDS
1. Government Offices			
2. Non-Government Funding Agencies (e.g., C.I.T.'s Client group associations foundations)			
3. Training-Partners (e.g., community colleges school boards)			
4. Agency Sponsor/ Program Board			
5. Other			

In the column titled "Source of information requirements", you can list the documents in which they are found. If information requirements have not been written out in official form, you can list who to consult to find out what, if any, information is needed.

Once the sources of accountability requirements are identified, you can review or consult them and list the specific types of information required.

The next step is to compare the information requirements to the lists of program records and their contents outlined in the program records inventory (Worksheet 33). Gaps should be noted and plans made to modify or add to the existing records as needed.

The procedure will also help you uncover unnecessary overlap in program records.

FITTING THE RECORDS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

Worksheet 35 presents an outline for investigating and planning the use of program records for local program evaluation.

It assumes that you have already decided on a set of evaluation objectives and questions keyed to particular program components (see Evaluation Planning Guide, Section II.E).

Begin with Worksheet 35 by listing the evaluation questions you want to answer. For each question, you can consult the Program Records Inventory (Worksheet 33) and note what records are relevant to the question and what information they provide. You can also decide whether any changes in recordkeeping procedures would make the records more responsive to program evaluation information needs.

In planning the use of program records for program evaluation, keep in mind the other methods of information gathering being used. Program records can complement and supplement other sources, such as interviews and questionnaires. They do not have to be a primary data source for every evaluation question.

WORKSHEET # 35

RECORD KEEPING FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION QUESTION?	WHAT RECORDS ARE AVAILABLE?	WHAT INFORMATION CAN THEY PROVIDE?	NEEDED CHANGES IN RECORDS SYSTEM	EVALUATION USE? (YES OR NO)

If records do not provide much useful information for some question, that does not necessarily mean that the recordkeeping system has to be changed. If the missing information is going to be obtained by other means you may choose to leave the recordkeeping procedures as they are. Gaps in the records can provide useful leads to questions for other evaluation instruments.

Deciding to get evaluation information from records or by other means is not necessarily an either/or decision. Information obtainable through program records is a useful way to cross-check information from other sources.

As with any method of information collection for program evaluation, there needs to be a schedule for compiling and summarizing program records. This will comprise part of the overall plan for evaluating the program (see Evaluation Planning Guide, Section II.F).

For accountability purposes, program staff will likely be required to submit information about all participants, activities, etc.

For program evaluation, it may not be realistic or necessary to review and summarize all the relevant records. When large numbers of participants or events are concerned, a sampling strategy can be used without sacrificing the quality of evaluation findings. Sampling strategies are discussed in Section II.F of the Planning Guide.

The key to making program records useful for program evaluation is to ask questions of the data contained in records.

If program staff do not approach the records with specific questions in mind, they are unlikely to see their relevance or to make them more relevant. Simply transferring participant background data from client records to a program evaluation report, for example, is a meaningless procedure unless the staff have a specific question in mind (Are we reaching the clients the program is intended to reach? Has our client population changed since the new government regulations came into place?).

A second key to making program records useful for program evaluation and accountability is to plan procedures and forms for summarizing information to be taken from the records. Forms can easily be constructed to enable information users to make comparisons and to see trends that are directly responsive to evaluation questions.

A third guideline to using program records for program evaluation is to schedule specific blocks of time for the evaluation team and other staff to think through and discuss records-based information.

Another tactic for increasing the usefulness of program records is the use of **decision rules**. Decision rules are guidelines for deciding when a situation has reached a point where action has to be taken.

Decision rules are decided ahead of time by program staff and evaluation planners. They are most useful for monitoring program activities and participant behaviors which can be counted. For example, what are unacceptable drop out rates or placement rates for trainees in a community-based training program? A decision rule would state that when the drop-out rate or non-placement rate reaches a particular level, the program staff will seriously consider corrective action.

Establishing decision rules is a way of making the staff more conscious and explicit about their expectations. It also makes record review more purposeful.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The use of program records raises the issue of confidentiality.

Some records, such as personnel and client files, may not be kept as "public" documents in their original state. In order to use and make them useful for program evaluation, you will have to decide what information can and cannot be made public without the informed consent of the people involved, or without setting up procedures to safeguard the confidentiality of individual participants.

In the process of interviewing community-based program staff while developing this manual, numerous instances were encountered where evaluations of participant performance were thrown away after grades had been recorded. This was done in the interests of confidentiality and in the interests of avoiding the build up of paper in program files.

The people interviewed did not seem to have considered the possibility of summarizing and aggregating the data from participant files to aid with evaluation of the program.

Our point here is to suggest that

- **people's rights to confidentiality should be considered before using information from private records; and**
- **when there are questions of confidentiality concerning use of program records for program evaluation, the information does not have to be discarded if appropriate safeguards are put in place.**

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WORKSHEET 32

PROCEDURES FOR USING PROGRAM RECORDS

1. Make a list of available records, their content and use.

ACCOUNTABILITY

2. Compare this list to information requirements for accountability.
3. Identify needs for modification or addition to existing recordkeeping procedures.
4. Revise recordkeeping procedures if needed.
5. Plan for record compilation and summarization.
6. Assemble and summarize records as planned.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

7. Compare list of available records (Step 1) to program evaluation objectives/questions.
8. Decide how records to be used for program evaluation.
9. Specify needs for modification or addition to existing recordkeeping procedures.
10. Revise recordkeeping procedures if needed.
11. Plan for record compilation and summarization.
12. Assemble and analyze records as planned

WORKSHEET # 33

PROGRAM RECORDS INVENTORY

RECORD TYPE/NAME	AVAILABILITY (EXISTING, PLANNED)	CONTENT SUMMARY	CURRENT USE
PROGRAM PLANS: (e.g., proposals, implementation, plans)			
PROGRAM CONTRACTS: (e.g. government, training partners)			
ORGANIZATION POLICIES/CHARTS:			
RECRUITMENT RECORDS:			
TRAINEE FILES: (e.g. personal background, performance, attendance, completion records)			
CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS: (e.g., course outlines, objectives, lesson plans, tests, handout materials)			

WORKSHEET # 33 (Con't)

PROGRAM RECORDS INVENTORY

RECORD TYPE/NAME	AVAILABILITY (EXISTING, PLANNED)	CONTENT SUMMARY	CURRENT USE
EMPLOYER CONTACT RECORDS:			
PERSONNEL FILES:			
MINUTES:			
FINANCIAL RECORDS:			
PROGRAM REPORTS:			
OTHER:			

WORKSHEET # 34

RECORD KEEPING FOR ACCOUNTABLILITY

WHO REQUIRES INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM?	SOURCES OF INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS	TYPES OF INFORMATION REQUIRED	LINKAGE TO CURRENT RECORDS
1. Government Offices			
2. Non-Government Funding Agencies (e.g., C.I.T.'s Client group associations foundations)			
3. Training-Partners (e.g., community colleges school boards)			
4. Agency Sponsor/ Program Board			
5. Other			

WORKSHEET # 35

RECORD KEEPING FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION QUESTION?	WHAT RECORDS ARE AVAILABLE?	WHAT INFORMATION CAN THEY PROVIDE?	NEEDED CHANGES IN RECORDS SYSTEM	EVALUATION USE? (YES OR NO)

SECTION III.H TRAINEE FEEDBACK

CREATING A CLIMATE FOR FEEDBACK

SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING USEFUL TRAINEE FEEDBACK

III.H TRAINEE FEEDBACK

Creating a Climate for Feedback

Program staff in many community-based training programs are strong believers in the principle of client centered training and services.

Feedback from program clients is highly valued and actively sought. Staff members speak proudly of the responsiveness and flexibility of their programs to the varying needs of different clients.

Not all programs, however, are equally successful in getting genuinely useful feedback from trainees.
This section of the manual presents **guidelines for setting up an overall strategy and climate for trainee feedback**.

Getting useful feedback from participants in educational programs is seldom treated as a distinct method of program evaluation. Indeed, suggestions in this manual concerned with data gathering instruments such as questionnaires, interviews and logs are all aimed at getting the most useful information possible from participants in community-based training programs.

Getting good feedback, however, is not just a technical matter of how to ask questions. Even well-worded questions are likely to get a disappointing response if trainees do not believe their opinions are really valued by program staff and can really make a difference in program services.

In order to get effective program feedback from trainees, you need to set up an overall strategy for client feedback which creates a receptive climate for feedback. The actual procedures used to gather information, such as interviews (individual, group) and questionnaires, are just elements of the broader strategy.

Suggestions for Getting Useful Trainee Feedback

Worksheet 36 outlines some basic principles underlying the development of an effective strategy and climate for trainee feedback.(4)

Program staff have to be open to trainee feedback. Staff attitudes alone, however, will not make it happen.

Opportunities for client feedback need to be organized and planned as part of the program process.

All too often, program staff wait until the end of the program to ask for feedback from trainees as to how it meets their needs. That is a sure way to reduce the quality and quantity of feedback, and to reduce the value of the feedback for both participants and the program.

A program that aims to be responsive to client needs cannot wait until the program is over to find out how well it is meeting those needs. Asking for and encouraging client feedback during implementation prepares the ground and sets the climate for constructive feedback at the end. It is very important to set the climate for feedback from the beginning.

You need to use a variety of methods -- oral and written, individual and group, formal and informal.
No single method of eliciting trainee feedback will do.
Program staff and trainees from the Metro Toronto Y.W.C.A. Working Skills for Women Program, for example, report the following methods of trainee feedback:

- weekly counseling sessions with each student
- evaluation questionnaires and conferencing every six weeks
- oral evaluations of each Life Skills class at the close of each session

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4 The author wishes to acknowledge and thank Luanne Karne, Program Worker, Working Skills for Women Program, Metro Toronto Y.W.C.A. for many of the practical suggestions on client feedback strategies presented in this section. Parts of this section draw from a session on Course Evaluation presented by Ms. Karne at a Program Evaluation Workshop at George Brown College in May, 1987.

- informal group feedback about other components of the program in Life Skills classes
- special group feedback sessions at trainee request
- exit interviews and questionnaires
- followup surveys of program graduates.

It is particularly important to strike a balance between individual and group opportunities for feedback.

Participants in community-based training programs are often a heterogeneous bunch with widely varying needs. The needs of one cannot be readily generalized to the others. Opportunities for individual input are important.

Some people, however, are reluctant to volunteer their opinions and feelings in a one-on-one situation. Group sessions can be a less threatening setting to express opinions. They also provide a chance for both trainees and program staff to see how widely shared the views expressed are by program participants.

When asking for trainee feedback, you should work to get information that describes, rather than judges. Knowing that trainees think there is a problem is not the same as knowing what the problem is.

This is the major weakness of trainee feedback strategies that rely strictly on paper and pencil ratings of satisfaction with different features of a program. Whether with interviews or with open-ended questionnaire items, useful trainee feedback depends on probing beyond value statements to descriptions of what is wrong and right about the program.

You also need to help trainees focus on things that can be changed. Part of getting constructive feedback is to involve trainees in identifying feasible alternatives to the status quo.

If the problems identified and solutions proposed cannot be realistically solved or carried out, trainees will become cynical or apathetic about giving future feedback. A climate for feedback cannot be sustained if nothing productive happens in response.

Written feedback is not enough. The quality of written feedback (i.e., ratings, open-ended written comments) depends in large measure on the trainees' willingness and ability to express themselves in these forms.

You should follow-up concerns identified through written feedback by talking with trainees individually or in groups. The clients served by community-based training programs often have literacy needs which work against a reliance on written evaluation forms. Even for those who are comfortable with questionnaires and who do write well, written feedback often falls short of fully describing the nature of the concerns raised by program participants.

The rule-of-thumb is to check out the meaning of trainee concerns about the program or their participation in the program. This means that when problems first surface, whether in writing or orally, you should ask for more information before deciding on a course of action.

It is a good idea to find out how widely shared problems and concerns raised by individual trainees are with the others.

An effective feedback strategy is responsive to trainee concerns as they arise. Ask for feedback when problems first surface. You will get a more accurate description of the problem and the conditions causing it if they do not wait until the next formal evaluation tool to ask. Trainees will also see that their concerns are not being ignored, even if you cannot take immediate corrective action.

Planned evaluation tools, like mid-way and end-of-the-program questionnaires can be used to corroborate concerns identified informally. It may be necessary to formally document a problem in order to justify changes in the program to supervisory authorities.

In order for a feedback strategy to work, you must respond to feedback as well as listen. A climate for feedback cannot be sustained if trainees do not see any action resulting from their concerns and suggestions. Two-way communication is imperative.

Planned reviews of trainee feedback should be built-in to the program. Time can be set aside at regular staff meetings, or special program evaluation meetings can be scheduled.

Planned reviews of trainee feedback need to happen during as well as at the end of the program. The initial "response" may be to plan further investigation of the nature of the problem and how widespread it is, before planning some intervention or program change.

Ongoing communication between staff about feedback from trainees is an essential component of an effective feedback strategy.

One of the difficulties for many community-based programs is that different components of the programs are delivered by instructors, counselors, etc., who are employed by different organizations. Different components of the program may be delivered at various places.

The result is that you and other staff members may have few, if any, opportunities to get together to share, clarify and plan appropriate responses to trainee concerns.

Life Skills classes, for example, are a prime time for identifying trainee concerns during the program. If the Life Skills teacher has no organized way of communicating those concerns to staff responsible for affected areas of the program, the information provided by trainees will not be of much use.

The same holds true for work placement coordinators in regards to their communication with instructors about trainee problems and concerns identified on the work site.

There is no simple solution to the problem of between staff communication when they are not all housed under the same roof and responsible to the same organization. It is an issue that has to be dealt with creatively and collaboratively by program administrators and staff to work out practical solutions.

Your willingness to talk about trainee feedback has to be complemented by a willingness to change the program in response to that feedback.

This does not mean that every trainee suggestion or complaint requires a change in the program. It does mean that you are prepared to consider that possibility, and to make modifications if the problems seem serious enough and the resources are available to carry out the solution.

To reiterate, **if trainees do not think their ideas and concerns are listened to and taken seriously, the usefulness of the feedback they offer will suffer.**

Finally, resources must be committed to implementing changes in response to participant feedback. Community-based training programs are unlikely to have much extra money available. It is important, nonetheless, for program developers and administrators to anticipate the need for ongoing and future modifications and to budget accordingly.

In this section, we have focussed on creating a strategy and climate for getting useful feedback from trainees. Trainees are not the only people with concerns and ideas about program operations. The suggestions for obtaining useful feedback can be applied as well to work placement employers, and to program staff themselves.

WORKSHEET 36

TIPS FOR GETTING USEFUL TRAINEE FEEDBACK

1. ORGANIZE AND PLAN OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINEE FEEDBACK.
2. ASK FOR FEEDBACK DURING THE PROGRAM. DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE END.
3. USE A VARIETY OF METHODS (ORAL & WRITTEN, INDIVIDUAL & GROUP, FORMAL & INFORMAL).
4. GET INFORMATION THAT DESCRIBES THE PROBLEM, NOT JUST VALUE JUDGEMENTS.
5. DIRECT FEEDBACK TO THINGS THAT CAN BE CHANGED.
6. SEEK CLARIFICATION/ELABORATION OF WRITTEN FEEDBACK.
7. CHECK OUT THE MEANING OF TRAINEE CONCERNS.
8. ASK FOR FEEDBACK WHEN PROBLEMS FIRST SURFACE.
9. RESPOND TO FEEDBACK AS WELL AS LISTEN.
10. PLAN ORGANIZED OPPORTUNITIES FOR STAFF COMMUNICATION ABOUT TRAINEE FEEDBACK.
11. BE WILLING TO CHANGE THE PROGRAM.
12. COMMIT RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENTING CHANGES IN RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK.

III.I STAFF DISCUSSION

STAFF DISCUSSION AS A METHOD OF EVALUATION

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF STAFF DISCUSSION

III.I STAFF DISCUSSION

Staff Discussion as a Method of Evaluation

Most program evaluation texts ignore the less formal ways program staff routinely go about evaluating their program efforts. This manual differs in that it includes both the formal tools of program evaluation (interviews, surveys, records) and some of the less formalized means of local program evaluation. One of the most frequently mentioned by community-based program staff is staff meeting discussion.

This portion of the methodology section of the manual serves two purposes:

1. **to acknowledge the legitimacy of staff discussion as a practical and useful program evaluation technique;**
2. **to suggest some ways of improving the use of staff discussion for program evaluation purposes.** (Worksheet 37)

As a method of program evaluation, staff discussion refers to the use of planned occasions for program staff to get together as a group to talk about program accomplishments, problems, possible improvements and so on.

Staff discussion is a normal program evaluation process in most settings. Anything else is supplemental to that or feeds into it.

Staff meeting discussion can function as an independent method of evaluation. The basis for discussion is the staff members' informal observations as ongoing participants in program operations. It does not have to be findings from questionnaires, structured interviews or other kinds of formal evaluation tools.

Staff discussions benefit from the dynamics of people working together to better understand a specific topic of concern. The sharing of experiences and ideas can lead to more in-depth understanding of program operations and concerns, and is a good source of ideas for the future development of more formal evaluation instruments.

It is unlikely that every component or feature of a community-based training program can be evaluated through the use of formal evaluation methods. Staff discussion is a practical way to cover those program features and concerns which do not warrant the use of formal tools.

Tips for Effective Use of Staff Discussion

Staff discussion for program evaluation need not be treated haphazardly. Effective staff discussion focussed on evaluating a training program takes careful planning. Worksheet 37 lists some tips for carrying out effective staff meeting discussions for program evaluation.

Specific times should be scheduled for relevant staff to talk about specific program evaluation topics or issues.

While this can be incorporated into the agenda of routine staff meetings, it is easy for day-to-day operational issues to dominate the use of staff meeting time. It is better to reserve certain meetings specifically for program evaluation talk, or to schedule special evaluation discussion meetings, in addition to regular staff meetings.

In effect, staff meeting program evaluation discussions can be managed like a focus group (see Section III.C, Interviews).

A list of questions or topics can be established ahead of time. One of the program staff can take the role of discussion moderator. Rules-of-thumb can be set to help make sure that individual claims about program accomplishments, effects and needs are checked out against the experiences of other staff members.

Recording procedures have to be set up. Some person or persons have to take responsibility for recroding and summarizing the findings, issues and conclusions reached through staff discussion.

Unlike a focus group, the participants should be instructed to spend some time preparing for the meeting. This means thinking about the issues to be discussed beforehand, and gathering relevant records and documents that help illustrate and give insight in those areas.

In order for program evaluation focussed staff meeting discussion to be productive, it must lead to follow-up action.

Evaluation meetings should conclude with agreement, and perhaps a written statement, on follow-up action to be taken as a result of the discussion. Follow-up action can run the gamut from decisions to modify the program, to seek further informatioin about the issue, or to take no further action on some issue.

WORKSHEET 37

TIPS FOR STAFF MEETING DISCUSSION

1. SCHEDULE SPECIFIC TIME FOR EVALUATION FOCUSSED STAFF DISCUSSION.

2. FOCUS STAFF DISCUSSION ON EVALUATING SPECIFIC PROGRAM ACTIVITIES OR CONCERNS.

3. BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE SCHEDULED TOPICS.

4. CHOOSE A MODERATOR FOR THE DISCUSSION.

5. RECORD COMMENTS, CONCLUSIONS, DECISIONS, ETC.

6. COMPARE INDIVIDUAL CLAIMS WITH EXPERIENCES OF OTHER STAFF MEMBERS AND INFORMATION SOURCES.

7. AGREE ON FOLLOW-UP ACTION

SECTION IV: ANALYZING EVALUATION INFORMATION

IV.A INTRODUCTION

IV.B WORKING WITH NUMBERS

IV.C WORKING WITH WORDS

IV.D CHECKING CONCLUSIONS

IV.E MAKING JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION IV.A INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING THE ACCURACY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

IV.A INTRODUCTION

Overview

Section IV of the manual is concerned with methods of summarizing and drawing conclusions from program evaluation data.

The suggestions offered in this section do not presume a high level of research expertise on the part of community-based training program staff. Of course, there are exceptions. But in the interviews and local agency evaluation reports reviewed while planning the development of this manual, no examples of highly technical statistical procedures or qualitative data analysis techniques were encountered.

It is unlikely that a manual such as this could produce major changes in the technical research skills of community-based program staff. Not enough detail (nor appropriate learning activities) can be presented.

The emphasis in this section, therefore, is on suggesting ways of improving what community-based program staff commonly do in analyzing and presenting evaluation data. The suggestions are both procedural and conceptual.

The purpose is to offer practical ways of making the analysis of program evaluation information as accurate and as informative as possible.

Evaluation texts suggest that increasing accuracy of evaluation findings depends on increasingly sophisticated statistical procedures, or increasingly time-consuming ways of analyzing open-ended information.

In our opinion, the potential for misuse is greater than the potential for good use, when complex research procedures are carried out by people with little professional research training.

The use of highly technical analytical procedures in places where they are not commonly used can make evaluation findings less intelligible and less believable to the people intended to use the information.

There are ways to improve the accuracy of evaluation findings which are not highly technical, and which are more in step with the skills, resources, and philosophical orientations of most community-based programs.

The following suggestions are offered as a strategy for improving the accuracy of program evaluation findings (see also Worksheet 38). The guidelines are sound from a technical research standpoint, and practical from the standpoint of community-based program resources.

Guidelines for Improving the Accuracy of Evaluation Findings

1. **Analyze evaluation information together as a staff.**
2. **Choose methods you believe in and can defend.**
3. **Find out how others have evaluated the topics of evaluation.**
4. **Use multiple sources of information.**
5. **Clarify your sampling strategies.**
6. **Plan how to analyze evaluation information before it is collected.**
7. **Summarize and display descriptive information (numbers, words) from which conclusions drawn.**
8. **Arrange information to look at relationships between program characteristics.**
9. **Question your confidence in evaluation findings.**
10. **Use basic statistics appropriately (tallies, averages, percentages).**
11. **Try out other ways of analyzing open-ended information than counting words.**
12. **Establish performance standards and use them to help interpret evaluation findings.**

Each of these guidelines is discussed in the remainder of this section on Analyzing Information. The first eight items are covered together. The last three are treated as separate subsections: (1) Working with Numbers; (2) Working with Words; and (3) Drawing Conclusions.

Guidelines for Improving the Accuracy of Evaluation Findings

Further clarification and suggestions for each guideline listed in Worksheet 38 and in the preceding introduction are presented here.

1. PROGRAM STAFF ANALYZE EVALUATION INFORMATION TOGETHER.

It is not uncommon for instructors and counselors in community-based training programs to turn in evaluation forms collected from program clients or completed by themselves to a program manager. The program manager then analyzes the information by herself for a few days and writes an "evaluation report".

It is important not to confuse a program manager's administrative responsibility for managing the evaluation of a program with responsibility for evaluating the program.

Responsibility for locally-directed program evaluation should be a joint effort involving all, or at least a representative group of program staff (see Organizing an Evaluation Team, Section II.D). There is no reason to suppose that a program manager, or any other staff member for that matter, is aware of everything that goes on with a program.

Reliance on the perspective and knowledge of a single individual for analyzing program evaluation data reduces the potential accuracy, credibility and utility of evaluation findings. The varied perspectives and knowledge about the program held by different staff members are a valuable resource for interpreting the meaning of program evaluation information.

2. PROGRAM STAFF BELIEVE THE METHODS ARE CREDIBLE AND DEFENSIBLE.

The question here is "Accurate for whom?". This manual is designed to help community-based training program staff evaluate their own programs with an eye towards future improvements. It is the staff's standards and criteria for accuracy that are at issue.

If the staff do not believe that the evaluation procedures they use produce valid and reliable information, they are unlikely to place much stock in the findings, or to use them as a basis for program improvement. Choose methods of analyzing evaluation information that you trust.

This means that the instruments and procedures for gathering and analyzing evaluation information have high face validity for intended information users. That is, they look like they measure what they are supposed to measure to the people they are expected to serve. And the information they produce does not fly in the face of common sense among people involved with the program.

A second dimension of this guideline is to choose methods that you can defend. If program staff are not prepared to defend their program evaluation findings and conclusions on the basis of the research methods employed, then use of those methods inspires less confidence in the accuracy of their interpretations.

This does not mean you should never try new ways of analyzing evaluation information. It does mean that until you have mastered some new technique, the accuracy of the findings and conclusions it leads to should be treated with caution.

3. FIND OUT HOW OTHERS HAVE EVALUATED THE TOPICS OF EVALUATION.

Whatever you are trying to evaluate, someone else has no doubt tried to evaluate it as well. It does pay to consult colleagues from other training programs, or from training institutions such as community colleges, about evaluation methods. You can improve the accuracy of your own evaluations by drawing on the "craft knowledge" of other training professionals.

4. USE MULTIPLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

It is very risky business to rely on single measures of anything. You can be more confident of the accuracy and meaning of a finding that is supported and clarified by multiple sources.

This can be done by a number of ways:

- **include several questions related to a single issue in an interview or questionnaire;**
- **ask similar questions of a number of people in the same and different roles;**
- **compare information collected by different methods (e.g., interviews, surveys, records, observation).**

This is not really a matter of using complicated analytical procedures. It is more a matter of organizing and displaying the information from various sources in such a way that the data can be compared.

5. CLARIFY YOUR SAMPLING STRATEGIES.

The accuracy and credibility of evaluation information depends on evaluation design as well as on the procedures used for information analysis.

The selection of people, sites, activities, etc., sampled for program evaluation has important implications for what you can say about the accuracy and generalizability of the findings. A random sample does increase the potential accuracy of evaluation information under certain conditions. A selected sample does under others.

Make yourselves aware of what sampling strategies you are using, and what the use of those strategies implies for the interpretation of evaluation findings. Alternative sampling strategies are reviewed in Section II.F.

6. PLAN HOW TO ANALYZE EVALUATION INFORMATION BEFORE IT IS COLLECTED.

This guideline has been reiterated throughout the preceding sections of this manual in Section II, the Evaluation Planning Guide, and the various sub-sections on methods of Information Collection in Section III.

Setting up procedures and forms for summarizing and interpreting information from the various sources of evaluation information beforehand is a useful way to ensure that you get the information you need.

By planning for analysis ahead of time, you will not have to deal with decisions about how to analyze when the time comes. A lot of time can be wasted figuring out what to do with data after you get it. This is time taken away from careful examination of the findings and their implications for the program.

Pre-planning the analysis of evaluation information is a particularly good way to get into the strategy of comparing information from multiple sources. You can identify the various sources of information that bear upon particular evaluation questions ahead of time and plan ways of pulling that information together.

You can also identify evaluation questions which are not being addressed through multiple sources of information, and modify data collection methods if you want.

7. SUMMARIZE AND DISPLAY DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION (NUMBERS, WORDS) FROM WHICH CONCLUSIONS ARE DRAWN.

Before program evaluation information can be interpreted, it has to be summarized and displayed, i.e. described in some form.

Closed-ended data can be summarized with numbers, graphs and/or tables. Other techniques are needed for open-ended data, e.g. content categories, illustrative quotes, time/event charts, case studies. These kinds of options are explored in more detail in the sub-sections on working with numbers and words.

We are advocating broad participation by program staff in the analysis of evaluation findings. It is important to ensure that everyone involved is working from the same set of facts.

We are also assuming that community-based training program staff are unlikely to rely on inferential statistics for interpreting the significance and meaning of program evaluation data. This means they will rely more on their ability to see and sense patterns and relationships in the data.

Your ability to do that will be aided by creating ways of summarizing and visually displaying the raw data (e.g., questionnaire and interview responses, observations, citations from records and logs) relevant to specified evaluation questions.

If local evaluation reports are submitted to supervisory authorities within or outside the sponsoring community-based organization, at least some of the descriptive information that contributes to the evaluation conclusions should be displayed in the report.

This will make the report more credible to reviewers outside the program. They can make their own interpretations of the descriptive data and compare them to those presented by the program staff.

8. ARRANGE INFORMATION TO LOOK AT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS.

The review of local program evaluation reports in developing this manual suggests that item analysis is the most common approach to analyzing evaluation information. By this we mean that individual items from questionnaires, interviews, etc., are summarized and analyzed independently of one another.

One rarely finds tables, charts or other devices which display the relationships between different measures of program characteristics or impact.

Two exceptions are tables which summarize trainee characteristics (e.g., age, family, employment, education), and tables which display and compare longitudinal data from several program cycles.

On the whole, attention to the possible relationships between different program characteristics represents a relatively unexploited approach to analyzing local evaluation data in community-based training programs.

This is less a question of the accuracy of evaluation findings and conclusions, than of the poverty of findings produced. Much more can be learned by examining relationships between program characteristics and effects than by simply relying on item analysis.

Frameworks for analyzing how different features of a program influence or relate to each other are suggested in the sub-sections on working with numbers, words, and making comparisons.

9. QUESTION YOUR CONFIDENCE IN EVALUATION FINDINGS.

When all is said and done, any evaluation information will still be imperfect. The data will not be made more accurate by ignoring the imperfections in how it was gathered and analyzed.

The local evaluation team should always be its own best critic when it comes to interpreting its own evaluation information.

Decisions to modify the program based on invalid information are clearly not in anyone's best interest. Attempts to use findings with low credibility to justify program continuation or expansion will not slip by unnoticed.

The best approach is routinely ask yourself how confident you are in the findings, to identify reasons for any lack of confidence, to reconsider your conclusions, and to acknowledge those limitations in your oral or written reports.

The remaining three guidelines for Information Analysis (see Worksheet 38) are discussed separately in the following three sub-sections: working with numbers, working with words, and drawing conclusions.

WORKSHEET 38

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING THE ACCURACY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

1. ANALYZE EVALUATION INFORMATION TOGETHER AS A STAFF
2. CHOOSE METHODS YOU BELIEVE IN AND CAN DEFEND.
3. FIND OUT HOW OTHERS HAVE EVALUATED THE TOPICS OF EVALUATION.
4. USE MULTIPLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION.
5. CLARIFY YOUR SAMPLING STRATEGIES.
6. PLAN HOW TO ANALYZE EVALUATION INFORMATION BEFORE IT IS COLLECTED.
7. SUMMARIZE AND DISPLAY DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION (NUMBERS, WORDS) FROM WHICH CONCLUSIONS ARE DRAWN.
8. ARRANGE INFORMATION TO LOOK AT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS.
9. QUESTION YOUR CONFIDENCE IN EVALUATION FINDINGS.
10. USE BASIC STATISTICS APPROPRIATELY (TALLIES, AVERAGES, PERCENTAGES).
11. TRY OUT OTHER WAYS OF ANALYZING OPEN-ENDED INFORMATION THAN COUNTING WORDS.
12. ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND USE THEM TO HELP INTERPRET EVALUATION FINDINGS.

SECTION IV.B WORKING WITH NUMBERS

OVERVIEW

TALLIES

AVERAGES

PERCENTAGES

RELATIONSHIPS

IV.B WORKING WITH NUMBERS

Overview

A common method of analyzing evaluation information is to count the number of similar responses or observations recorded for individuals or groups of participants.

This method is used mainly with evaluation instruments that contain closed response items. These are questions with pre-defined response options, such as "yes/no", multiple choice questions and ratings. Numbers are sometimes used to summarize the frequency of similar responses to open-ended questions, as well.

Section IV.B offers some procedural suggestions for analyzing program evaluation information with numbers.

Numbers are used to summarize and represent the actual things recorded on evaluation instruments. They help reduce large amounts of information to simple figures or symbols which can be used to describe, interpret and communicate information about evaluation findings. Numbers used in this way are called **statistics**".

There are many ways of counting numbers when analyzing evaluation data. Different calculations yield different types of numbers. Each has its own particular meaning. An "average", for example, does not mean the same as a "percentage", though they are both types of numbers and can be used to describe the same set of facts.

Effective use of numbers for analyzing evaluation information requires agreement on the meaning of the statistics employed. It also requires knowledge of what statistics are appropriate in what situations.

Once evaluation information is converted to numbers, statistical calculations are available to describe various ways in which numbers representing different program features and effects are related to one another.

One can use statistics to analyze and describe how much variation there is within a set of numbers, whether the differences between numbers are probably attributable to chance or to actual program effects, and whether numbers and the things they represent are correlated to each other in some way (i.e., a change in one results in a change in the other).
Many different statistics and statistical calculations

could be used in carrying out locally-directed evaluations of community-based training programs. The actual number used is quite small, though the extent to which they are used is quite large.

In this manual, we suggest ways of improving the way numbers are most commonly used to analyze program evaluation data at the local program level. The presentation covers the use of

- **tallies**
- **averages**
- **percentages.**
- **relationships between numbers**

It suggests various ways of displaying numbers in tables and graphs.

If you are interested in learning about and using more complicated statistics and procedures than those presented here can get that information from a variety of sources. Some useful texts are listed in the references at the end of this section.

Courses in basic statistics can be taken at community colleges and universities. And there are certainly consultants willing to help design and carry out program evaluation studies using statistics.

We use or encounter tallies (sums), averages and percentages in many of our daily affairs. They are certainly not just used for evaluating education and training programs. One of the difficulties in using them for program evaluation is that the everyday uses we make of these statistics are not always appropriate, and are sometimes misleading, when applied to program evaluation information. Here we offer some guidelines to help make the best use of these kinds of numbers in analyzing evaluation information.

Tallies

When confronted with a set of questionnaires or other evaluation forms full of closed-response items, the first instinct is to tally all the answers or marks recorded for each item.

How many trainees said they were "very satisfied" with the Math Upgrading course? How many said they were "not very satisfied"? How many said "yes" to the question about changing the schedule for work placements? How many said "no"? Once the individual responses have been recorded together, they can be easily added up to get the total number of responses for each item.

It is a good idea to make a tally of the responses recorded for the various items included on evaluation forms. But it should not be the first idea.

First you should think over how the tally can be fitted to the questions the evaluation is intended to answer, and to the kinds of analysis you expect to perform.

Step one in working with any information that is going to be converted into numbers is to set up a data summary sheet. A data summary sheet records on one form the number of responses or observations pertaining to specific items from questionnaires, interviews, or observation forms.

A data summary sheet prepares the information for analysis. After a data summary sheet has been developed and the information recorded, you should not have to waste time referring back to the original evaluation forms.

The quick and easy way to tally responses from individual evaluation forms is to use a blank copy of the form for a data summary sheet. Each completed evaluation form is reviewed. Checks or tally marks are entered next to the appropriate response option for each item on the evaluation form. The process is repeated until all the individual forms are reviewed.

A second blank copy can then be used to record in numbers the total marks entered for each answer.

This approach is convenient, but has several drawbacks. The main one is that it limits the evaluation team to a global measure of responses to each item on the evaluation form. One cannot detect possible patterns of responses across different items for different respondents.

Secondly, the format of the original evaluation form may not lend itself to tallying all the individual responses. There may not be enough space to conveniently score the answers to 30 questionnaires on the original form. Responses may be arranged at several places on a page, which makes it confusing to transfer data to the tally sheet and to look it over afterwards.

Data summary sheets do not increase the amount of time it takes to tally responses from individual evaluation forms. Data summary sheets reduce the amount of time it takes to analyze that information once recorded. It is particularly important to summarize and display raw data in a clear uncluttered way when more than one person is involved in its interpretation.

Data summary sheets should be developed for each evaluation instrument (questionnaire, interview guide, observation form, etc.). Summary sheets follow the same sequence as the items listed on the evaluation form. That way the person transferring responses from the original forms does not have to jump around from section to section on the form to fill out the summary sheet.

Two ways of tallying responses are as follows:

1. **Record all answers to each response option together.**
2. **Record the answers to each response option separately for each completed evaluation form.**

Using the first procedure, individual respondents are lumped together from the start. If you want to find out later whether people who said "no" to question #10 were likely to say "no" to some other question as well, it is impossible to do without going back to the original forms and making another tally.

The second procedure allows you to record the same information while preserving the pattern of individual responses for future analysis if needed.

If have access to computerized data analysis, option two is certainly preferred. If evaluation forms are going to be tallied and subsequent calculations done by hand, the advantages of the second procedure diminish as the number of evaluation forms increases.

An alternative is to decide whether the individual evaluation forms can be grouped into two or three major categories from the start (e.g., by participant characteristics, time of data collection). Grouped responses for each major category can then be separately tallied in different columns on the same summary sheet.

The basic guideline for tallying is to ask yourselves

> **"What questions are we trying to answer with the information recorded on this evaluation form?"**
>
> **and**
>
> **"How can we tally that information in a way that will best summarize the raw data for future analysis?"**

A final comment about tallying the raw data concerns the problem of missing data. Individual questionnaires, interviews and other evaluation forms may not have responses recorded for every item.

In tallying and adding up the totals for individual items, the number of missing responses needs to be recorded as well. The number of missing responses is a critical issue in the subsequent calculation and comparison of averages and percentages.

Averages

The use of averages in analyzing local evaluation data from community-based training programs is common. The use of averages, however, is full of pitfalls that can lead to erroneous and misleading interpretations of evaluation findings.

An average is a single number which is used to represent the central tendency of a group of numbers.

A simple average is computed by dividing the number of responses recorded into the sum of those responses. This is quite easy when one is dealing with lists of numbers, like participant ages, periods of unemployment, or grades, as illustrated in these examples:

EXAMPLE 1: Average Age of Trainees

Trainee Ages
34
24
27
37
33

$$\frac{\text{sum of trainee ages}}{\text{number of trainees}} = \text{Average}$$

$$\frac{155}{5} = 31 \text{ years old}$$

EXAMPLE 2: Average Number of Weeks Unemployed

Weeks Unemployed
36
25
18
40
28

$$\frac{\text{sum of weeks unemployed}}{\text{number of trainees}} = \text{Average}$$

$$\frac{147}{5} = 29.4 \text{ weeks unemployed}$$

EXAMPLE 3: Average Final Grade

Final Grade Points
4.01
4.06
3.95
3.61
3.77

$$\frac{\text{sum final grade points}}{\text{number of trainees}} = \text{Average}$$

$$\frac{19.40}{5} = 3.88 \text{ average final grade point}$$

Computing simple averages is a little more complicated when numbered ratings are involved. The basic procedure is illustrated in these two examples:

EXAMPLE 4: The organization of this course was:

	Poor	1	2	3	4	5	Excellent
(# of responses)			**(1)**	**(5)**	**(3)**	**(1)**	

Rating		Number of Responses		Rating X Number of Responses
1	X	0	=	0
2	X	1	=	2
3	X	5	=	15
4	X	3	=	12
5	X	1	=	5
		10		34

$$\text{Avg. rating} = \frac{34}{10} = 3.4$$

If a rating scale does not have numerical values to begin with they can be added for purposes of analysis.

EXAMPLE 5: The instructors have been:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
(# of responses)		**(4)**	**(4)**	**(3)**	**(1)**

Response Category	Rating Value		Number of Responses		Rating X Number of Responses
Poor	1	X	0	=	0
Fair	2	X	4	=	8
Good	3	X	4	=	12
Very Good	4	X	3	=	12
Excellent	5	X	1	=	5
			12		37

$$\text{Avg. rating} = \frac{37}{12} = 3.08$$

The problem with simple averages is that they do not always represent an accurate summary of the way the numbers are distributed in relation to each other.

If the numbers all tend to cluster together, or if they are fairly evenly distributed between the highest and lowest number, a simple average can provide an appropriate summary.

If there are a few numbers that are substantially higher or lower than the rest, those extreme cases can alter the simple average so that it does not really represent the central tendency of the bulk of the responses.

Use of simple averages can also be misleading when there are clusters of high numbers and clusters of low numbers but few in-between. Computation of a simple average would result in a figure falling in-between. This would mask the important fact that there were two dramatically different clusters of responses, for example, one group of highly satisfied employers and one group of highly dissatisfied employers.

In order to deal with these inaccuracies, statisticians have invented other ways of calculating and talking about averages. They call the simple average illustrated in the examples above the "mean". The "median" and the "mode" are two other ways of describing the central tendency of a group of numbers.

The mode is simply the number that occurs most frequently. It is not inappropriate to report the most frequently appearing number in a series, particularly when that number represents a majority of the responses. In such cases, however, it is important to say something about how the other numbers are clustered or distributed, as well.

Sometimes the numbers in a set cluster around a high number and a low one. In this case there are two modes. In this instance it is highly inappropriate to calculate and report the simple average of all the responses. The fact that the numbers cluster around two opposing points should be reported instead.

The median is the middle number in a group of numbers. In other words, it is the number above and below which 50% of the other numbers fall. The median is a simple way to represent the central tendency of a group of numbers.

Finding the median requires no special calculations. List and tally the number of responses, divide by 2 and count from the bottom or top to find the middle number.

The median is superior to the simple average when there are a few numbers which are extremely high or extremely low relative to the rest. It is not affected by these unusual numbers.

In summarizing participant ages, for example, there might be situations where one or two participants are much older or younger than the rest. Reporting the median, rather than the simple average, will present a less distorted summary of the age distribution of the group.

The quickest way to tell whether to use a simple average, the median or the mode(s) is to construct a graph that displays the frequency of each response relative to the others. This shows visually how the responses are distributed when counted.

A common way of doing this is to take graph paper and list the possible response options (whether with numbers or words) on the horizontal axis. On a vertical axis to the left numbers are indicated to mark the frequency of responses recorded for each option. Xs are entered in the appropriate columns for each response.

The result shows whether the responses cluster around a particular item or items; whether they are evenly distributed from least frequent to most; whether they are bunched up in some way; and whether there are outliers, i.e. responses which are isolated from the main cluster of responses.

The rules-of-thumb are:

- **if the frequency count peaks in a single place and there are no isolated cases, the simple average can be used;**
- **if the responses are bunched up to one side of the frequency chart with some isolated responses on the other, then report the median;**
- **If the frequency of responses peaks in more than one place, then it is more appropriate not to try to summarize the data with a single number.**

Percentages

The fundamental guideline for using percentages is don't interpret or report a percentage without referring to the numbers on which it is based.

The simplest procedure is to always arrange numbers and percentages together, whether in adjacent columns or rows on a table, or in parentheses in the text of a report, as in these examples:

EXAMPLE 1: Present Marital Status

Marital Status	Number of Participants	%
Married	13	37%
Never Married	9	25%
Separated	8	23%
Divorced	3	9%
Common Law	2	6%
TOTAL	35	100%

EXAMPLE 2: During the program there was great improvement in the students' typing speed and accuracy.

14% (2 students) improved their nwpm by 15 to 20 nwpm
50% (7 students) improved their nwpm by 21 to 30 nwpm
22% (3 students) improved their nwpm by 31 to 40 nwpm
14% (2 students) improved their nwpm by 41 to 50 nwpm

EXAMPLE 3: Nineteen (55%) former participants stayed in the program 6 months or less and 16 (45%) more than six months. Ten women (28%) were enrolled from 11 to 12 months.

When complete data (numbers and percentages) are displayed in a table, it is acceptable to cite highlights from the table without repeating all the figures so long as the table is kept in the text. For anyone trying to interpret the meaning of a percentage, it is awkward to have all the raw numbers buried in an appendix.

The reason for providing the numbers underlying the percentages is simple. The meaning of a percentage is relative to the size of the number it is a proportion of. The smaller the actual number on which the percentage is based, the more inflated and potentially misleading the percentages are in reporting program characteristics and effects.

Consider this example from a follow-up study question on types of training or education pursued by graduates of a bridging program.

Full-Time Education/Training Involvement

Course	# Students	%
Electronics	3	30%
Courseware Design & Procedures	1	10%
Microcomputer Management	1	10%
Office Equipment Repair	1	10%
General Machine Apprenticeship	1	10%
Microcomputer Business Applications	2	20%
Pre-Health Program	1	10%
TOTAL	10	100%

Had the evaluators of this program not included the numbers, anyone interpreting the information would fail to realize that 10% of the students only equalled one person.

This caution works the other way as well. If the number of responses is greater than 100, percentages alone may not convey the true magnitude and importance of the program characteristic or effect measured.

For community-based training programs, the more common situation is the use of percentages when dealing with small numbers. This is because many programs serve small numbers of clients, as few as 12 to 15 in some cases.

An alternative to percentages, particularly with small numbers, is to use descriptive adjectives with the numbers, such as "a majority of the respondents (6 out of 10)", "most of the respondents (8 out of 10)", "few of the respondents (3 out of 10)", and "about three quarters of the respondents (7 out of 10)". It is not a bad idea to set some criteria ahead of time for when to use words like "few", "some", "majority", "minority" and "most".

A second guideline for using percentages is don't rely on people to remember the numbers on which the percentages are based.

A common oversight in program evaluation reports is to cite the total number of respondents to a questionnaire or interview at the beginning, and then switch to percentages from there out. It is easy to forget what the percentages are a proportion of after a few paragraphs or pages.

Questionnaires and other evaluation instruments often contain missing data for some items. A survey may have been filled out by 30 trainees, but all 30 many not have completed every item.

This means that a figure like "20% of the respondents" will carry a different meaning for different questions. These differences and their significance for interpreting the data will be missed if the numbers are not included.

Another pitfall in using percentages is the practice of calculating percentages of a percentage. This often happens when people summarizing evaluation information analyze variations in findings for a sub-set of numbers that has already been taken as a proportion of a larger set.

The following example paraphrased from a local evaluation report illustrates how this works and the potential confusion that results.

> **37% of the students who filled out the questionnaire have met with the Career Counsellor (32 students). 63% of the respondents indicated they had not met the Career Counselor. Their reasons are as follows:**

20%	**"no reason"**
21%	**"not ready for a job, need more skills"**
21%	**"haven't got around to it yet, but I'm interested**
12%	**"I don't need it"**
10%	**"She is hard to reach, especially in the evening"**
8%	**"I have found employment"**
6%	**"I already have a Career Counselor"**

The example depicts two problems. The number of respondents to the questionnaire is reported 10 pages earlier in the report as 102. The percentage of respondents referred to here is actually the number that completed the question, not the number who turned in the questionnaire. The percentages of students who met/did not meet the Career Counselor are actually proportions of 87, not 102.

Having clarified the totals, we can figure out that the 63% figure refers to about 55 students. Continuing the recalculations, we find that 20% represents about 11 students, 6% about 3, and so on.

The program staff who analyzed this data would have been better off citing the numbers alone, or in conjunction with the percentages.

It is not that the percentages are incorrect. It is just that when you start taking percentages of other percentages the actual meaning of the values gets confused.

The conclusion is the same: **IF YOU ARE GOING TO USE PERCENTAGES, REFER TO THE NUMBERS AS WELL.**

The final guideline for use of percentages is hinted at in the preceding paragraphs. Don't directly compare percentages derived from different sized sets of numbers.

The 63% figure cited above, for example, is a percentage of those responding to a single item on the questionnaire. It is not the same as 63% of the 102 trainees actually participating in the survey. The confusion can be avoided by adding in the numbers.

Relationships

Statistics can provide more information than just averages and percentages. They can be used to describe different ways in which the things the numbers stand for are related to one another.

Three types of relationships most frequently examined are

- **the amount of variation**
- **the amount of difference**
- **the degree of correlation between numbers.**

When statisticians calculate the average for a group of numbers, they usually calculate how much the numbers vary from that figure as well. This statistic, called a standard deviation, indicates whether the numbers cluster closely around the average, or whether they are spread out over a wide range from highest to lowest.

Knowing how much variation there is from the average tells you how representative the average is of the group.

If you would like to learn more about calculating and using the standard deviation, you should refer to the references cited at the end of this section.

If you are not comfortable with the calculation and meaning of the standard deviation, there are other ways of getting at the same information.

One way is simply to construct a graph or chart that visually diagrams the number of responses recorded for each item.

The second way is to state the range of scores, as well as the average or median. The range can be described either by stating the highest and lowest figures, or by stating the difference between the two, as in these examples.

> **"The age range was twenty to sixty-three years of age. The median was thirty-six."**
>
> **"The average length of time at their present job was five years. The median was four years and the range was two months to fourteen years."**

Simply citing the average (or median) conveys nothing of the actual variation among participants in the program. Stating the range is a simple but highly illuminating way to increase the amount of information summarized and reported from evaluation information.

Statistical procedures can be used to analyze the difference between numbers representing separate sets of data. This is done to find out if the difference is big enough to be an effect of the program, or whether it is probably just a result of chance variation. For example, you might want to judge whether the difference between trainee ratings of their own self-confidence recorded at the beginning and end of the program could be due to the program. Or you might want to assess changes in participant performance levels following a change in learning materials or teaching strategies.

Statistical procedures are also helpful to examine possible correlations between different features of the program represented with numbers. Are trainees who do not score well on technical skills tests less successful in obtaining employment upon completion? Is use/non-use of job counseling services related to the type or wage level of jobs obtained?

These kinds of questions cut to the core of program evaluation. An evaluation that cannot respond adequately to a program staff's desire to be informed about the effects and effectiveness of program services can hardly be called useful.

To answer questions about program effects and correlations using statistics, however, requires a level of statistical competence which is not characteristically found among program staff in community-based training programs. It is not just a matter of manipulating numbers using standard formulas. Appropriate use of complicated statistics requires a sound understanding of the reasoning underlying their use.

At the end of this section there is a list of useful resource books on statistical procedures. If you want to find out more about such things as significance tests, tests of differences, and tests of correlations you should consult those books or similar resources.

Our aim here is to suggest some practical alternatives to assessing the significance of relationships between program features represented by numbers.

The alternatives are foreshadowed in the "Guidelines for Improving the Accuracy of Evaluation Findings" listed in the introduction to Section III and in Worksheet 38.

The key components of the strategy for analyzing relationships between program features and effects are:

1. **Summarize and display descriptive information from which conclusions are drawn.**
2. **Arrange information to look at relationships between program characteristics.**
3. **Use multiple sources of information.**
4. **Clarify your sampling strategies.**
5. **Program staff analyze evaluation information together.**
6. **Question your confidence in evaluation findings.**

From a procedural standpoint, the basic idea is to set up tables, charts or other graphic displays that enable you to visually inspect the relationships they want to examine.

If possible, information bearing on the question should be summarized and brought together from multiple data sources (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, test records). The members of your evaluation team should analyze the information together.

Interpretation of the significance and importance of the relationships between selected program features and effects does not have to depend on the use of statistical procedures.

The strategy outlined here relies on the consensus of knowledgeable program staff, and on the convergence of multiple sources of information.

This strategy does not assume that evaluation findings are perfectly true. It does not assume that evaluation findings are interpreted solely on the basis of information collected for the evaluation. It does not assume that you make decisions about modifying a program solely on the basis of evaluation information.

Evaluation information contributes to the decision-making process. It does not control it. The goal is to use evaluation information to help make reasoned judgements about the program, not to establish absolute truths. The issue of conclusion drawing is taken up more specifically in Section IV.D, Checking Conclusions.

REFERENCES

Abbey-Livingston, Diane and Abbey, David S. Enjoying Research? A "How-To" Manual on Needs Assessment. Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, 1982.

Fitz-Gibbon, Carol Taylor and Morris, Lynn Lyons. How to Calculate Statistics. Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1978.

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IV.C WORKING WITH WORDS

OVERVIEW

ANALYZING WORDS: CURRENT PRACTICES

- Analyzing Open-ended Responses
- Analyzing Case Studies

ANALYZING WORDS: ADDITIONAL TECHNIQUES

- Coding
- Displaying Qualitative Data
- Drawing Conclusions from Words

IV.C WORKING WITH WORDS

Overview

Section IV.C is concerned with methods of analyzing evaluation information that is recorded in words.

- **open-ended questionnaire items**
- **interview notes**
- **observation notes**
- **logs**
- **narrative records**
- **documents**

Researchers call it qualitative data (as opposed to data converted to numbers, quantitative data).

Section IV.C has two major parts. It begins with a look at common uses of qualitative data in community-based training programs, focussing on the analysis and use

- **of responses to open-ended questionnaire/interview items**
- **of case studies of clients in community-based training program evaluation reports.**

Examples from several reports are used to illustrate common practices, and to point out more and less effective ways of using this kind of information.

Part two moves beyond current practice to suggest some ways to increase and improve upon the analysis of qualitative data in the local evaluation of community-based training programs.

Working with words is not easier than working with numbers. Words are not as easily organized and summarized as numbers, and there are no clear rules to tell you when the information they convey is or is not "significant".

We will not get into the intricate possibilities of qualitative analysis anymore than we did with statistics. We will, however, suggest a few basic ways of working with words that could be put to good use with a little extra thought, patience, effort and time by community-based program staff. The topics covered include:

- **coding words**
- **reducing and displaying words**
- **case analysis**
- **conclusion drawing.**

The potential for improving the use of qualitative information in the evaluation of these programs is great. The payoff for program staff, in terms of increased understanding of their programs and client experiences, is also great.

Analyzing Words: Current Practices

The following comments are based on a review of the uses of qualitative information in a sample of community-based training evaluation reports gathered for the development of this manual.

The two most common uses of qualitative data in these reports are the analysis of

- **open-ended responses to questionnaire/interview questions**
- **presentation of case studies of trainees.**

A third form of qualitative data found is trainee reports on their experiences in the program.

These forms of evaluation data in words do not represent the totality of qualitative information that often enters into the evaluation of community-based training programs. They only represent the kinds of qualitative information that make it into the final reports.

The uses of data from such things as teacher or trainee logs, observation notes, notes of trainee/teacher conferencing, and staff meeting minutes are not considered here.

Many of these sources of qualitative evaluation information are gathered and maintained mainly for the purpose of individual client assessment. Their use for program level evaluation is largely unexploited. The procedural suggestions presented in part two of this sub-section will suggest ways of mining this potential.

ANALYZING OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Worksheet 39 lists these tips for analyzing responses to open-ended survey or interview questions.

Worksheet 30 lists some "do's" and "dont's" for presenting open-ended responses in reports. These recommendations are based on an examination of common uses of this kind of information in community-based training evaluation reports.

At the risk of seeming overly negative, we begin with a review of undesirable practices. A review of effective uses of open-ended response data follows.

Common Problems in Using Open-ended Response

RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS ARE GATHERED BUT NOT USED.

In a few of the evaluation reports reviewed, blank copies of evaluation instruments which included open-ended questions were attached. Data from those questions were not presented, summarized or referred to in the text of the reports.

This is an unfortunate waste of potentially valuable information.

OPEN-ENDED DATA ARE PRESENTED BUT IGNORED.

One version is to include copies of questionnaires with all open ended responses listed under the appropriate questions in an appendix to a report. The analysis presented in the text of the report, however, excludes consideration of responses to all or some of the questions.

This is not just a matter of presenting the data. If nothing is said about the data, one can be reasonably certain that it has not been seriously analyzed.

SELECTIVE ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF DATA FROM OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS.

In one report examined, for example, the evaluators repeatedly listed and summarized only the "positive" responses.

In another, responses to open-ended questions about what trainees did not like about the program and their recommendations for improvement were listed on a copy of the questionnaire in an appendix. The text of the report, however, only referred to those responses that indicated what they liked.

We can acknowledge the public relations value of accenting the positive in public reports. Program improvement, however, is not aided by screening out open-ended data that suggests the need for change.

DATA ARE PRESENTED IN AN UNANALYZED FORMAT.

Responses to open-ended questions are simply listed. They are not grouped or arranged to communicate any messages about what program staff have learned from that data.

"Eyeballing" a list is a convenient way to begin to analyze open-ended responses. It is not a good place to stop.

If summary or interpretive statements are made about open-ended responses in a report, the data should be arranged and displayed to reflect those conclusions.

Consider the difference between these two presentations of open-ended responses from two local evaluation reports.

EXAMPLE 1: What did you like most about the workplace?

- people are friendly; I have learned a lot of skills; they considered me one of their employees; I had a variety of jobs to do
- the friendly atmosphere; the chance I got to gain my independence; I was never bored; I was given a variety of work to do; the fact that my employer was interested in the program and its success gave me a lot of encouragement
- the positive reinforcement I received from my supervisor kept me going. Also the school environment is a pleasant working atmosphere; the staff is very congenial
- the friendly atmosphere and the constant encouragement
- people were very friendly; I learned a lot about what resources are available in Toronto; I had responsibility
- etc............

EXAMPLE 2: Suggestions for Program Improvement

Administration

Clearer statement of goals and expectations at beginning of program (4)

Breaks during the program (2)

Improved scheduling of courses

More integration with student peers outside the program

Changed name to indicate academic component

Increased emphasis on punctuality and attendance

Reporting of absenteeism to instructor rather than other student

Curriculum

Content	Instruction
Options within and among courses according to individual needs and academic background (6)	More demands and challenges as program progresses (6)
Offering of chemistry and and biology in addition to or as alternatives to physics(2)	Individual or group learning depending upon individual learning style (2)

The open-ended responses recorded in Example 1 are presented in an unanalyzed format. You can read them and get leads to common themes like "friendly environment", "varied work experiences", "employer encouragement", "new learning opportunities", but the responses have not been arranged to check out the vitality of those leads, nor to support any summary conclusions presented in the text.

By contrast, the open-ended responses in Example 2 have been arranged to reflect two kinds of analysis:

1. variations in content (administration, curriculum--content and instruction);

2 frequency of mention.

With or without accompanying text, Example 2 is clearly a more effective analysis and presentation of open-ended response data.

ABSENCE OF EXPLANATORY COMMENTS IN THE TEXT. It is not sufficient to let open-ended responses speak for themselves. You have to ask yourself what the data are saying to you and what it means for the program.

You need to

- **summarize the responses in a descriptive way**

- **to interpret their implications for evaluating the program;**

- **to communicate these conclusions your colleagues and to those you are accountable to.**

When open-ended data are presented without explanation, one is left wondering whether program staff have learned anything from them.

PLACEMENT OF OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE DATA IN AN EVALUATION REPORT.

Leaving them in the appendix is not advised. Ideally, they should be incorporated into the text of the report in association with whatever evaluation questions they help answer.

They should be accompanied by explanatory comments that summarize and/or interpret their meaning in the text of the report.

They should appear with other qualitative or quantitative evaluation findings which relate to the same issue or concern.

WHETHER OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES SHOULD BE COUNTED, AND WHAT THE NUMBERS MEAN.

Grouping and counting like responses (as in Example 2 above) is a frequent technique of analyzing open-ended questions in community-based training evaluation reports.

We do not want to suggest that counting words has no place in the analysis of qualitative evaluation data. We do want to suggest that conclusions based on word counts are not very reliable in and of themselves.

The main problem is that because they are open-ended, people only record the first things that come to mind. The failure to mention something listed by someone else does not necessarily mean the two people do not share the same view. If directly asked about the missing item, the person might easily concur that it reflects her views as well.

Grouping and counting similar open-ended responses may suggest what is salient on people's minds. It does not indicate how widely held the views expressed are.

Enumeration of open-ended reponses is legitimate so long as it is presented and interpreted with caution. It is not appropriate to convert numbers representing open-ended responses to percentages, and to treat the responses as if everyone voiced their agreement or disagreement with every response category listed.

One simple precaution is to always keep words and numbers together when dealing with qualitative data.

The number of times something is mentioned is not the only measure of its significance. From the standpoint of program improvement, program staff should look to the substance of the open-ended responses before dwelling on the numbers. An insightful recommendation for change should not be ignored just because it is not spontaneously mentioned by a dozen other respondents.

Finally, counting words is not the only way of organizing and drawing conclusions from open-ended responses. It is often the case that responses are not similar enough to be grouped in a numerical way. The result is long lists of seemingly disparate responses. In this type of situation in particular, you can look for patterns or themes in the data that enable you to cluster individual responses under broader categories.

Worksheet 40 provides a list of "do's and dont's" for the presentation of open-ended question data.

In closing, the following tips are suggested as a practical procedure for analyzing open-ended question data (Worksheet 39).

Suggested Steps for Analyzing Open-Ended Responses

1. **Review all responses, making note of patterns, themes, or categories.**

2. **Prepare data summary sheet(s) to permit grouping of responses according to identified patterns, themes or categories.**

3. **Record and group similar responses together on the summary sheet(s).**

4. **Give a descriptive label to each group of responses.**

5. **Look for patterns, themes or subcategories within each response group. Consider alternatives to counting the number of similar responses.**

6. **Write a brief statement summarizing and interpreting the information contained in each group of responses.**

7. **Look for patterns or themes that unify or cut across the major groups of responses.**

8. **Consider and note connections/leads to other sources of data.**

9. **Write a brief statement summarizing and interpreting the full set of open-ended responses.**

10. **Ask what confidence you place in the findings and record your response.**

ANALYZING CASE STUDIES

Case studies are a powerful and illuminating way of communicating information about the program and its clients to outside audiences. Their publicity and educational value for external audiences cannot be denied.

Case studies of individual clients are frequently included in community-based training program evaluation reports. Three uses were identified:

1. **Cases to illustrate client motives for entering the program.**
2. **Cases to illustrate client views of program effects on self.**
3. **Cases to illustrate client reasons for dropping out of the program.**

Obviously, cases could be used for many other purposes than these. Examples of some case studies of individual clients included in local community-based training program evaluation reports are provided on the following pages. None of these contain the names of the actual clients.

The narrative form of the case studies encountered in local evaluation reports also varied. Most were paragraph length descriptions. A few were longer, but rarely more than a page.

Who speaks in the cases also varies. Some describe clients from a third person perspective. Some include an observer's eye description interspersed with quotes from the clients. Others are self-reports by clients in their own words.

The main problem with the use of client case studies in the reports examined is that there is rarely any accompanying analysis. One does not get the sense that program staff have studied the cases to see what can be learned for program evaluation (except in the case of drop-outs).

EXAMPLES OF CLIENT CASE STUDIES

EXAMPLE 1: CASE STUDIES OF CLIENT MOTIVES FOR ENTERING THE PROGRAM

Ms. M., age 63, had to work because she was not eligible for a pension. She had a new part-time job which required that she do some work on a computer. She was told that other workers would help her but they all seemed too busy. Ms. M.'s anxiety was increasing and she needed to get over her fear of using the computer or risk being out of a job.

Ms. M., age 40, was the mother of two elementary school children and an active volunteer, preparing and writing position papers for a social agency. She plans to return to the paid work force in the near future. Her background was library science. She to the course to add to her present skills and prepare her for a job in the paid work force.

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EXAMPLE 2: CASE STUDIES OF CLIENT REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT OF THE PROGRAM

1. This woman maintained good attendance and punctuality until December. At this point she started being late one or two times a week. Then she began missing class altogether often without phoning, although she usually went to her work placement. She was frequently counselled by staff, but the problem only got worse. The main reason she gave for her lateness and absences was a hyperactive child who kept her awake at night. Until December her mother and brother were providing care for this child at night. In December her mother moved away and her brother got a job. She was placed on probation after 16 days absence and 14 days late. She did not live up to her contract and was withdrawn.

2. This woman was admitted in the last week of allowable entry into the program to replace one of the early withdrawals. She was on the waiting list, even though she was not on any form of public assistance. She was dependent upon the irregular payments of her former husband. The staff never understood why she was put on the waiting list, and she never received a training allowance. She withdrew because she could not afford not to receive an income and went back to her only means of earning an income as a short order cook. It was also evident from evaluation of assignments, that she had no aptitude for secretarial work.

EXAMPLE 3: CASE STUDY OF CLIENT BACKGROUND, PROGRAM EXPERIENCE AND OUTCOMES

Jill is 33 years old. She is a typical "welfare" mother at first glance. She is also the devoted and fairly wise mother of a twelve year old boy. Jill came to our program after successful upgrading in another program. Her family broke up when she was 15 and her father remarried. Her stepmother had a daughter the same age and she felt very rejected, quit school after grade 8 and left home. To this day she has very little support from her immediate family.

Jill took a number of factory jobs to support herself until she had her first child. She could not return to work becuase he was hyperactive and no daycare would accept him so she resigned herself to being on Family Benefits until he was old enough to be left alone after school. She was very active in the community center before joining our program.

Jill was positive in her attitude to the program almost to the point of naivete. Although lacking formal schooling, she applied herself well. She had a genuine curiosity about computers and went well beyond the required assignments. Although not very interested in English, she learned her lessons, asked questions freely and learned the required work as well. She was assigned to a supportive but demanding workplace where she learned a great deal about working in an office. Jill also contributed a great deal to her employers who told her that they were going to miss her and her work when she finished the course. She was as conscientious in her work placement as she was in class.

Shortly before the program ended, Jill got the first job she applied for. She is the administrative assistant to the director of a social service agency. She feels very positive about the job. She told the director that she felt she had much in common with the people the agency serves in terms of not having had an easy life. The program made it possible for this woman to realize some of her potential. The difference it has made in her life and in her son's life is difficult to quantify; however, she is off public assistance, earning about $15,600 a year and doing a job she enjoys and is well qualified to do.

Often case studies come across as carefully selected testimonials of the virtues of the program, i.e., as public relations pieces rather than as evaluation data. This impression stems from the tendency to present a selection of cases without indicating how representative they are how they were selected. Different rationale for case selection (e.g., critical cases, typical cases) were described in the Planning Guide (Section II.F).

Case studies can be a powerful and illuminating way for you to learn more about the program, how it is working, how it is experienced by clients, and so on. In order for that to happen, however, you have to prepare and study the cases.

Oral presentation and discussion of cases in staff meetings is one way. This is already done at the level of individual client assessment in many programs. Here, however, we are looking for ways of using case study data for evaluation at the program level.

With an appropriate set of guidelines for what information to cover in case presentations, a good sense of what evaluation questions you are trying to answer, and a procedure for recording the presentation and following discussions, there is no reason why program evaluation analysis of a selected sample of client cases could not be done through staff discussion.

The production and analysis of written case study materials for the purpose of community-based training program evaluation has far greater potential than simply illustrating the benefits of the program.

Some of the suggestions included in the second part of this section point to practical ways of analyzing case study notes and descriptions.

In terms of their present use, the recommendations listed in Table 18 should help increase the usefulness of case study data in local program evaluation reports.

TABLE 18

TIPS FOR CASE STUDY ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

1. **If you are not going to present all the cases, then decide what kind of selected sample will give the most information for your evaluation question.**

2. **If you use a selected sample of cases, communicate your reasons for selecting that sample in your reports.**

3. **Ask yourself, and tell your audience, how representative you think the cases you present are of the larger group.**

4. **Spend some time thinking together about what they say and what they imply for the program. Then communicate those conclusions to yourselves and in your reports. Don't let the cases just speak for themselves.**

5. **Use systematic procedures for case analysis whenever feasible (see following discussion).**

Analyzing Words: Additional Techniques

CODING

Coding is one of the time honored techniques for analyzing and reducing research data recorded in words.

One of the main problems and disincentives to analyzing narrative data is word overload. With so many words to look at it becomes difficult to keep track of the important pieces of data, to assemble them, and to reduce them for purposes of analysis. Coding is a procedure for classifying qualitative information into meaningful chunks for further analysis.

Codes are simply categories for labelling the original data. Codes can be descriptive or interpretive.

There are two basic approaches to code development. In the first approach, you develop a tentative list of codes for classifying particular sources of qualitative information before reviewing the data. Such a code list would probably be linked to specific evaluation questions and/or program goals.

An example of this approach is given on the following page. A set of codes is specified from program goals listed on a performance rating form. These codes are then applied to the analysis of open-ended comments of trainee supervisors. This enables you to relate the open-ended data to the performance ratings, and makes it easier to summarize and compare the open-ended data for several trainees, or for the same trainee over time.

Once you settle on a set of codes, they are listed on a single page for easy reference. The codes should be grouped into major logical categories. This makes them easier to recall and retrieve for purposes of analysis.

One or more staff members takes on responsibility for reading through the narrative evaluation data and labelling the text with the codes in the margins.

Since more than one person will be involved in the analysis, it is important that everyone agrees on the meaning and reference of the codes. Written definitions are preferred.

The second approach to code development is to create codes based on findings in the data, rather than fitting the data into preconceived categories.

The most efficient way to do this is to read through at least a portion of the qualitative data first to get an impression of the whole. You can keep a running list of possible descriptive or interpretive codes as you go, but you do not actually start coding the raw data.

Once a quick review of the data is completed, a tentative code list is drawn up to reflect the information contained in the qualitative records.

You then return to the data and actually enter the codes. You may add new ones as you go, but they will fit into the logical scheme established with the preliminary code list.

An example of how this approach might be used to code and sort open-ended questionnaire responses is provided on the following pages. The data are first coded. Then a grid called a matrix is set up to rearrange the data for analysis. The matrix in the example groups similar responses. One could also set up a matrix to compare responses of individual clients in terms of the code categories.

A hybrid approach is to develop a list of broad categories for initial coding. And then derive grounded codes at the point of more focussed analysis. For example, one might want to block out all narrative data in trainee journals that were indicative of "attitudes to work" (maybe with an abbreviation like "WORK/ATT") the first time through. The chunks of text coded that way could then be assembled and inspected more closely, and a set of codes developed to reflect different kinds of attitudes towards work.

Coding is not just a way of preparing qualitative data for analysis. It begins the analysis.

Once the data are coded, they can be manipulated in any number of ways. Similarly coded data can be assembled and looked at together. Data classified with different codes can be easily retrieved and arranged together to look at relationships. Coded data also enable easy retrieval of relevant segments of qualitative data for evaluation report presentations.

EXAMPLE OF CODE DEFINITION AND APPLICATION DERIVED FROM PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

CODE NAME	CODE CATEGORY DEFINITION
PUNC	PUNCTUALITY: Promptness when reporting for work, when returning from breaks.
DEPEN	DEPENDABILITY: The ability to carry out job functions according to written and oral instructions.
COMM	COMMUNICATION SKILLS: The ability to use various communication techniques in establishing rapport with clients.
NEED	UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF CLIENTS.

ETC...

===

SAMPLE OF APPLICATION OF CODES TO WORK PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

Susan had had difficulty participating in her
field placement with this agency. She has
maintained an aloofness which has made
Comm communication and supervision difficult. She has
been ill frequently and taken the initiative in
not providing service, i.e., she simply did not
Punc go. I question how she will be able to function
in any service situation where she is bound to be
asked to cope with difficult/unpleasant
situations. She has seen her placement here as
Need debasing, yet there is a vital service component
in our services to seniors with she was unable to
appreciate. I found her judgmental.

EXAMPLE OF DATA-BASED CODES AND DISPLAY OF CODED DATA

DATA AS ORIGINALLY SUMMARIZED FOR ALL TRAINEES

1. What did you like most about the workplace?

- people are friendly; I have learned a lot of skills; CLIMATE
they considered me one of their employees; I had a SKILL
variety of jobs to do VARIETY
- the friendly atmosphere; the chance I got to gain my CLIMATE
independence; I was never bored; I was given a variety RESPON
of work to do; the fact that my employer was interested
in the program and its success gave me a lot of SUPPORT
encouragement
- the positive reinforcement I received from my SUPPORT
supervisor kept me going; some days I felt so sick and
irate, but he kept telling me I was a good worker and a
pleasant person. He is a great confidence-builder. Also
the school environment is a pleasant working atmosphere CLIMATE
the staff is very congenial
- the friendly atmosphere and the constant CLIMATE
encouragement
- the only thing I liked about my workplace was the CLIMATE
environment. It was very interesting to learn something SKILL
about politics and how laws are debated.
- people were very friendly; I learned a lot about what CLIMATE
resources are available in Toronto; I had SKILL
responsibility. RESPON
- first, my supervisor is understanding, patient, even SUPPORT
tempered and good-natured -- an excellent person to VARIETY
train anyone; second, I was given a variety of jobs to
do, which made it interesting while learning; third the CLIMATE
atmosphere was calm and friendly.

Etc......................

(SEE NEXT PAGE FOR DISPLAY OF THIS DATA IN DATA MATRIX)

SUMMARY OF OPEN-ENDED DATA AFTER CODING

CLIMATE

people are friendly

friendly atmosphere

pleasant working atmosphere

very friendly

atmosphere calm and friendly

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

learned a lot of new skills

learned something about politics

learned about resources in Toronto

RESPONSIBILITY

got to gain my independence

had responsibility

responsibilities

VARIETY OF WORK

had a variety of jobs to do

given a variety of work to do

given a variety of jobs to do

variety of tasks

EMPLOYER SUPPORT

gave a lot of encouragement

positive reinforcement from supervisor

constant encouragement

supervisor understanding, patient

DISPLAYING QUALITATIVE DATA

One of the problems with data recorded in words is how to display the information for purposes of analysis and presentation.

Quotations from the original sources is, of course, the most frequent tactic. As illustrated in the discussion of open-ended responses, lists of quotations can quickly become more confusing than illuminating without some descriptive or interpretive framework.
A relatively easy and productive way of organizing and displaying narrative information to look for patterns is to construct matrices that permit the cross-classification of words keyed to two or more variables.

A matrix is nothing more than a blank sheet of paper blocked off in rows and columns with cells big enough to write in summary quotes or statements. The rows are labeled along one dimension of interest. The columns along another.

For example, the program staff might want to analyze possible changes in trainee attitudes towards themselves as reflected in personal diaries from beginning to the end of the program. Copies of trainee diary entries throughout or at several points during the program would be coded first so that statements reflecting attitudes towards self could be assembled. A matrix could be set up with rows for each trainee and columns for three or four points or stages of the program. Examples of attitude statements from the diaries of each trainee would then be pulled and recorded in the appropriate box in the matrix. An example of how such a matix would look is provided on the following page.

Once completed the evaluation team could quickly look for evidence of changes in attitudes across time for individuals and for the group. They could also look for patterns across the group at different stages in the program.

Cross-classification matrices are an organizing tool. They do not create meaning. They simply help patterns that are in the data come into view. Sometimes they do not turn up meaningful relationships. When they do, they can also be used to display qualitative data in evaluation reports and presentations.

The possibilities for constructing matrices to examine qualitative data are limited only by your imagination. The important thing is to identify and agree on what dimensions and relationships are most relevant to answering the evaluation questions.

Coded data is much easier to retrieve for matrix analysis. Obviously, it is a good idea to think about what relationships you want to examine before you do the coding, so that you don't have to go back and do it again.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS FROM WORDS

Everything said so far contributes to effective conclusion drawing from qualitative evaluation data. We end this section with a point form summary of some key ways of making sense out of qualitative data (Worksheet 41).

Conclusion Drawing Techniques for Qualitative Data

1. **Counting -- words conveying similar messages can be counted to help check out hypothesis or findings that depend on quantified data.**
2. **Themes/patterns -- recurring patterns which integrate or tie together individual pieces of data.**
3. **Clustering -- grouping items that seem to go together.**
4. **Identifying classes of phenomena -- specific items are subsumed as instances of more general categories.**
5. **Comparing relationships -- using cross-classification matrices to compare the correlations between qualitative data on separate variables.**
6. **Search for missing variables -- looking for categories of information that link up other categories of information. Breaking large chunks of information into smaller segments.**
7. **Looking at what seems plausible-- systematically checking out plausible hypotheses about the program using qualitative data.**

All of these techniques are really common sense tactics. The difficulty is not in doing them, rather in recognizing when you are doing them, and in accepting them as acceptable ways of interpreting qualitative information.

Just because you uncover an apparent pattern or relationship in the analysis of qualitative information does not guarantee the accuracy and consistency of that finding. Conclusions based on words are just as susceptible to error as those based on numbers, and just as in need of verification.

Section IV.D outlines strategies for checking conclusions based on numbers and words.

REFERENCES

Miles, Matthew and Huberman, Michael. Analyzing Qualitative Data: A Source book of New Methods. Sage Publications. 1984.

Patton, Michael Q. Qualitative Evaluation. Sage Publications. 1980.

WORKSHEET 39

TIPS FOR ANALYZING OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

1. Review all responses, making note of patterns, themes, or categories.

2. Prepare data summary sheet(s) to permit grouping of responses according to identified patterns, themes or categories.

3. Record and group similar responses together on the summary sheet(s).

4. Give a descriptive label to each group of responses.

5. Look for patterns, themes or subcategories within each response group. Consider alternatives to counting the number of similar responses.

6. Write a brief statement summarizing and interpreting the information contained in each group of responses.

7. Look for patterns or themes that unify or cut across the major groups of responses.

8. Consider and note connections/leads to other sources of data.

9. Write a brief statement summarizing and interpreting the full set of open-ended responses.

10. Ask what confidence you place in the findings and record your response.

WORKSHEET 40

TIPS FOR PRESENTING OPEN-ENDED QUESTION DATA

DO'S

1. Do display open-ended data with summaries and conclusions.
2. Do arrange open-ended data to reflect summaries and conclusions.
3. Do place open-ended data displays near summaries and conclusions.
4. Do summarize and interpret open-ended data.
5. Do try out ways of describing and interpreting open-ended responses other than counting words (see Worksheet 31).
6. Do present qualitative and quantitative information together.
7. Do present a balanced summary of the open-ended responses (positive and negative).

DON'TS

1. Don't present summaries and conclusions without displaying the data.
2. Don't bury open-ended data in the appendix.
3. Don't present open-ended data in an unanalyzed/unorganized format.
4. Don't just let the data "speak for itself".
5. Don't just count words.
6. Don't just report the "positive" responses.
7. Don't convert open-ended responses to percentages.

WORKSHEET 41

CONCLUSION DRAWING TECHNIQUES FOR QUALITATIVE DATA [4]

1. Counting -- words conveying similar messages can be counted to help check out hypothesis or findings that depend on quantified data.

2. Themes/patterns -- recurring patterns which integrate or tie together individual pieces of data.

3. Clustering -- grouping items that seem to go together.

4. Identifying classes of phenomena -- specific items are subsumed as instances of more general categories.

5. Comparing relationships -- using cross-classification matrices to compare the interaction between qualitative data on separate variables.

6. Search for missing variables -- looking for categories of information that will link up other categories of information. Breaking down large chnks of information into smaller segments.

7. Looking at what seems plausible-- systematically checking out plausible hypotheses about the program using qualitative data.

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[4] Adapted from Miles, Matthew and Huberman, Michael. Analyzing Qualitative Data: A Sourcebook of New Methods. Sage Publications, 1984.

IV.D CHECKING CONCLUSIONS

The hallmark of good evaluation practice is not the use of sophisticated procedures for data collection and analysis. It is the willingness of the people doing the evaluation to be skeptical of initial findings, and to do what they can to check out conclusions against other sources of information or possible interpretations.

Worksheet 42 lists some strategies for checking initial findings and conclusions drawn from program evaluation information. These tactics apply equally to data recorded in numbers and in words.

Obviously, you will not apply every one to every finding. The list orients you to a range of possibilities. Some will be applicable to your situation. Others will not.

Responsibility for checking the accuracy and consistency of evaluation conclusions belongs to the staff as a group. The personal knowledge of the program that each staff member can bring to bear on the interpretation of and verification of evaluation findings is a fundamental check on the believability of those conclusions.

WORKSHEET 42

STRATEGIES FOR CHECKING EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS

1. Check if the findings make sense in light of what staff know about the program and clients.

2. Check the consistency of findings across the program.

3. Check out other explanations for findings than those initially posed.

4. Look into cases/situations that don't seem to fit the finding.

5. Compare (triangulate) information from different methods and sources.

6. Weight the findings in terms of your own sense of what sources are more or less credible.

7. Get feedback from program clients (trainees, employers) to see if conclusions make sense to them.

8. Consider whether the design of the evaluation or the way it was carried out affect the trustworthiness of the findings.

9. Use your evaluation data to check out things you think you already know (your informal conclusions and intuitions about the program).

IV.E MAKING JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MAKING JUDGEMENTS

MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

IV.E MAKING JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Making Judgements

Up to now we have focussed on the basics of describing and verifying evaluation findings. We have not zeroed in on the process of applying standards and making evaluative judgements about the findings, whether qualitative or quantitative in substance.

There is no single category of standards that necessarily applies in judgements about program effectiveness. A program's performance could be compared to one or more of a variety of "standards", including the following:

TABLE 19

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

- **Program goals**
- **Terminal performance objectives**
- **Program evaluation questions**
- **External performance standards for the occupation**
- **Participant opinions (trainees, staff, employers)**
- **Performance requirements of funders and regulatory agencies**
- **Past program performance measures**
- **Entry level performance of current program group**
- **Client goals for themselves**
- **Client needs**
- **Performance of similar programs**
- **Long term outcomes of program graduates**

Lists of standards commonly applied in the evaluation of specific program components are included in each of the appendices (e.g., course evaluation, work placements).

You and your evaluation team should reach some agreement about which standards will be applied to program evaluation findings during the planning phase of evaluation (see Planning Guide, Section II.E, II.F). This will ensure that appropriate information is gathered to make the desired comparisons and judgements.

Identifying standards at the planning stage will also help focus data analysis. Data can be organized while they are being analyzed to enable relevant comparisons and judgements to be carried out without a lot of extra time and effort.

Try to think of charts, matrices, tables, etc. that will enable you to juxtapose indicators of standards to information reflecting on program performance.

All too often, program goals, terminal performance objectives and the like get listed at the front of an evaluation report. The findings get listed at the end. The connections between the two may be asserted, but they do not really get examined.

If you cannot figure out a way to match your standards up to your indicators of performance, then it is time for serious reflection on what your indicators of performance are actually measuring (see for example, Guidelines for Assessing the Relevance of Existing Tests, Section III.E).

Another reason for clarifying what evaluation standards will be applied is that it may be necessary to gather and prepare information about those standards as part of the data gathering process (e.g. participant opinions, external performance standards, client goals, funder requirements).

Making Recommendations

All is for nothing if the program evaluation process and data are not used to support recommendations for program change and improvement, or to lobby against unnecessary changes. The guideline is simple. **MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS**.

It helps to plan for utilization. This begins at the stage of formulating evaluation questions (Section II.E, II.F). You should always be asking yourself what difference the answers to potential evaluation questions would make to what the program is presently doing.

One of the reasons for writing formal program evaluation reports or making formal evaluation presentations on a regular basis is to capitalize on the opportunity they provide to clarify, justify, advocate and initiate changes in the programs.

When presenting recommendations with formal evaluation reports or presentations, make sure the recommendations are connected to the evaluation findings. Whether in point form initially or in the body of the presentation, recommendations should be placed along side the data and conclusions on which they are based.

There are often some recommendations which are not based on evaluation data. It is a good idea to point that out, so that people reading or listening to an evaluation presentation do not end up wondering where the rationale and support for those recommendations comes from. It is naive to think that evaluations drive the decision-making process for program improvement. Evaluation data are part of the context that frames those decisions. They are not the only stimulus for change.

Evaluation findings are likely to point toward many more changes than can possibly be followed up.

- **Talk about what can be done.**
- **Clarify what cannot be done.**
- **Focus on feasible recommendations.**

Making recommendations is a job for the program staff as a group. It is not the sole prerogative of a program director. It is the staff who will have to carry out and live with the consequences of any changes. Staff members involved in the actual delivery of program services are likely to have the best handle on what is or is not feasible in practice. It is important, therefore, to schedule special opportunities for program staff to review or listen to the program evaluation report, and to discuss possibilities for change in the context of evaluation findings and conclusions.

SECTION V: APPENDICES

V.A ENTRY CRITERIA AND PROCESS

V.B COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS

V.C INSTRUCTION

V.D LEARNING STYLES

V.E WORK PLACEMENTS

V.F TRAINEE PERFORMANCE

V.G ACCESS TO SERVICES

V.H COMPLETION OUTCOMES

V.I FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

V.J PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

APPENDIX V.A

ENTRY CRITERIA AND PROCESS

General Considerations

The evaluation of entry criteria and process for selection of trainees in community-based programs has two focusses:

1. **Evaluating applicants for training**
2. **Evaluating the recruitment & screening process**

Here we summarize some of the issues, methods, standards, and information objectives that come into play in carrying out these evaluations.

The selection of trainees for participation in community-based training programs requires assessment of applicants in terms of three sets of criteria:

1. **Government/funder eligibility criteria**
2. **Program client group criteria**
3. **Course pre-requisites**

Some Canadian Jobs Strategy Programs, for example, are supposed to serve individuals who have been unemployed for 24 out of the last 30 weeks. A local program might be set up to serve people fitting this criteria from a particular client group, such as sole-support mothers in a specific neighborhood, recent immigrants with a common cultural background, or people with similar physical disabilities (e.g., blind, developmentally disabled). Beyond that, the training course itself may have certain educational or skill pre-requisites. Programs set up to teach word processing, for example, often require some basic keyboarding skills. Many programs require functional literacy in English and/or Math at Grade 10 or higher.

Recruitment and screening processes are not often the focus of in depth formal evaluation at the local level. Program staff tend to zero in on information about referral sources, the efficiency of application procedures, and the effectiveness of public orientation sessions. Concerns are often expressed about the appropriateness of screening processes (e.g., functional level and skills tests), but evaluation of those processes tends to remain at the level of staff discussion.

The major evaluation issue in this domain of program operations is the fit between course pre-requisites and entry criteria. The issue has two sides.

1. **Do you fix pre-requisites (education, skills) for the course and select only people who satisfy those criteria?**

2. **Do you select a particular type of client and then tailor the course objectives to their entry-level needs and characteristics?**

This poses a dilemma for community-based training programs. On the one hand, they are usually client-centred and highly committed to meeting the needs of trainees (which suggests option #2 above). On the other hand, they are often set up to prepare trainees for employment or further education in a specific field which has specific entry-level performance standards (which suggests option #1 above).

Course pre-requisites should be consistent with the time frame and type of training the program is able to provide. Because community-based program clients are often employment disadvantaged in one way or another, programs tend to use flexible entry criteria. The upshot is that trainees may be accepted for training with performance objectives that cannot realistically be attained with the time and training provided.

This issue is particularly important for "joint training programs", when community agencies purchase existing programs or courses from other organizations, such as community colleges. Training partners may be asked to deliver courses, and even to give certificates, to students who do not have the normal pre-requisites for those courses, and who may not be able to reach the level of performance expected in the time period allotted.

Where it exists, this problem cannot be resolved without a serious and systematic effort to evaluate and adjust the relationships between participant characteristics, program entry criteria, course pre-requisites and terminal objectives.

Apart from their interest in participant outcomes, government ministries and other funders of community-based programs are keenly interested in whether local programs reach the clients they are set up to serve. From a program evaluation perspective, this means that programs ought to keep track not only of the characteristics of the trainees that do get in the program, but also of those that do not.

The impact of changes in eligibility criteria imposed by the government or other funders is an entry criteria issue that deserves more attention than it often gets. Such changes are welcomed when they open the door to a wider range of applicants, and lamented when they restrict eligibility. The impact of such changes is usually dealt with at a political level by program advocates. Lobbying efforts would be greatly enhanced if local program evaluations set out to actually document the effect of such changes on the program (participant selection, curriculum, training objectives, etc.).

Methods of Evaluating Entry Criteria and Process

The following lists summarize the range of methods of evaluating entry criteria and processes used in community-based programs consulted in developing this manual.

Methods of Evaluating Applicant Characteristics

- **Questionnaires (application forms)**
- **Screening interviews**
- **Records review (referrals, transcripts)**
- **Tests (basic academic skills, technical skills)**
- **Staff discussion**

Most programs gather information from more than one method. Examples of closed and relatively open-ended screening questionnaires and interview instruments are included at the end of this Appendix.

Methods of Evaluating Recruitment & Screening Process

- **Trainee questionnaires**
- **Staff questionnaires**
- **Staff discussion**
- **Program records**
- **Staff logs**

Some of the evaluation standards commonly applied to the assessment of trainee entry criteria, recruitment and screening are as follows:

Evaluation Standards for Entry Criteria & Process

- **Trainee fit to eligibility criteria (government and/or local program)**
- **Trainee fit to course pre-requisites**
- **Course compatibility w/ program entry requirements (length, terminal objectives, subject matter)**
- **Trainee fit with target client characteristics**
- **Ratio of applications received to training seats available**
- **Frequency of referral from referral sources (flyers, bulletins, newsletters, counselors, friends, etc.)**
- **Perceived absence of major barriers to participation and completion of training**

What to look at?

Tables 20 and 21 summarize participant characteristics and features of the recruitment and screening process sometimes considered in the evaluation of community-based training programs. The list is based on interviews with program staff and review of screening forms and procedures from a number of programs.

TABLE 20
COMMONLY EVALUATED ENTRY CRITERIA

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY
- funder criteria
- local program criteria
- course pre-requisites

APPLICANT COMPETENCIES
- functional grade level (English, Math, etc.)
- entry level technical skills
- language proficiency (English, other)
- job search skills
- social skills to work in occupational field

APPLICANT ATTITUDES
- work attitude & habits (punctuality, willingness to take directions, etc.)
- commitment to training
- self confidence
- emotional stability

PERSONAL/FAMILY BACKGROUND
- marital status
- dependents
- country of birth
- residence
- age & sex
- immigration status
- personal references

INCOME
- income sources (wages, unemployment, welfare, family, etc.)
- income level

APPLICANT GOALS/MOTIVES
- career goals
- educational goals
- goals/reasons for joining the program
- future plans (general)

EMPLOYMENT STATUS
- employed
- full/part time
- how long
- employer

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY
- most recent jobs held
- full/part time
- length of employment
- employers
- experience outside Canada
- career changes made or desired

UNEMPLOYMENT STATUS
- unemployed
- how long
- looking for work
- kind of job seeking
- # jobs applied for in recent months

EDUCATION HISTORY
- formal education completed (when, where, level)
- academic strengths
- diplomas, certificates
- prior training
- current training

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION
- general (open-ended)
- day care arrangements
- linguistic difficulties
- family responsibilities
- transportation
- lack of education
- lack of work experience
- physical or emotional disabilities
- low self-esteem
- drug/alcohol problems
- work habits/appearance
- job search skills
- unrealistic goals

TABLE 21

COMMONLY EVALUATED FEATURES OF RECRUITMENT & SCREENING PROCESS

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

- referral sources (agencies, ads, newsletters, counselors, friends, etc.)
- referral procedures
- need for/effects of orientation sessions
- effects of eligibility requirements on recruitment
- results of recruitment strategies

SCREENING PROCESSES

- screening procedures
- application form & procedures
- interview process
- testing process
- test relevance & appropriateness
- group orientation process
- qualifications of assessment personnel

APPENDIX B

COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS

General Considerations

What are some practical effective ways to evaluate course content and materials? Here we review some common methods, standards, questions and issues for evaluating course content and materials in community-based training programs.

"Course content" refers broadly here to course objectives, learning activities, the information presented, and methods of evaluating student performance. "Materials" refers to the learning materials (texts, handouts, equipment) and facilities.

We are specifically not including "instruction" under this heading, though we recognize that evaluation of instruction is often included in or with course evaluation instruments. Evaluation of instruction is reviewed in Appendix C.

Methods of Evaluating Course Content and Materials

Here is a list of different methods of evaluating course content and materials used in community-based training programs:

Methods of Evaluating Course Content and Materials

* **student questionnaires (entry, interim, final)**
* **student interviews (individual, group)**
* **staff questionnaires**
* **staff discussion**
* **implementation records review (lesson plans, assignments, activity logs, etc.)**
* **measurement of student learning (progress, outcomes)**
* **advisory committee content review (course objectives, course descriptions, materials)**
* **employer surveys (interviews, questionnaires)**
* **followup studies of program graduates**
* **local program committee content review**

Most programs use a combination of methods. Student questionnaires, however, are the single most common formal instrument for evaluating course content and materials.

The choice of standards for judging course content and materials is equally varied. Some alternatives include:

Evaluation Standards for Course Content and Materials

- **student satisfaction/opinions**
- **student goals and needs**
- **staff opinion**
- **program (course) goals & objectives**
- **before/after measures of student performance**
- **external expert opinion**
- **employer opinion**
- **current job market indicators**
- **followup measures of student outcomes**
- **official training standards for targeted occupation**

As with methods, many programs employ multiple standards. There is a direct connection between methods and standards. Evaluation of course content and materials from the perspective of student satisfaction, for example, is accomplished mainly through student questionnaires or interviews.

What to look at?

Table 22 summarizes aspects of course content and materials which are frequently examined in the context of local program evaluations. The list is based on a review of student evaluation questionnaires and interview guides gathered for the production of this manual. In broad terms, the list covers material features of the course (e.g., objectives, content), factors affecting student learning, student goals and expectations, and student outcomes.

TABLE 22
COMMONLY EVALUATED FEATURES OF COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS

OBJECTIVES
- technical clarity
- student understanding of
- match to planned content
- match to content as delivered

ORGANIZATION
- overall
- course outline structure
- presentation of content
- coordination w/ other courses in program
- schedule/length

CONTENT
- job relevance
- level of difficulty
- content gaps
- match to official goals, objectives & plans
- perceived usefulness
- coordination with other courses in program

PRESENTATION
- pace
- organization
- methods appropriateness (discussion,lecture, self-study, etc.)
- helpfulness of method

LEARNING MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT
- perceived "helpfulness"
- level of difficulty
- availability/access
- overall quality
- match to objectives & content
- contribution to learning

STUDENT EVALUATION METHODS
- student understanding of
- match to course objectives
- fairness

LOCATION/FACILITIES
- overall suitability
- space
- lighting, air, noise, etc.

LEARNING FACTORS
- contributing factors
- hindering factors
- most "useful" features of course
- student learning styles

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE
- for program staff
- for students
- free comments

STUDENT GOALS
- student goals for course
- student motives for enrolling
- student expectations of course
- student skills objectives

ENTRY LEVEL COMPETENCIES
- course-related skills & knowledge
- student confidence in subject/skill area

STUDENT SATISFACTION
- overall satisfaction
- expectations met
- what they "liked"
- overall course quality

STUDENT OUTCOMES/IMPACT
- areas of growth
- skill development
- quantity of learning
- job related confidence
- job opportunities
- personal goal achievement

The list of commonly evaluated features of course content and materials in Table X summarizes the kinds of concerns program staff gather student opinions about. Some high priority concerns about course content and materials cannot be adequately examined on the basis of student opinion. Other methods among those listed above must be used.

Participants in an evaluation workshop held while developing this manual emphasized the following "important things to evaluate about course content and materials".

- **JOB RELEVANCE**
  - does course lead to employment?
  - does course fit current labor market/employer needs?
  - is course "recognized" by employers?

- **RELEVANCE TO FURTHER EDUCATION**
  - does course prepare students for more training/ education?
  - does course link up with other training opportunities?

- **APPROPRIATENESS OF PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES**
  - to student abilities?
  - realistic for amount of time and training provided?

APPENDIX C

EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION

General Considerations

The evaluation of instruction is closely linked to the evaluation of course content and materials (see Appendix B) . The two are often evaluated together in course evaluation questionnaires. Here we review some common methods, standards, questions and issues for evaluating instruction in community-based training programs.

We include the evaluation of teacher qualifications, teaching methods, and course presentation under the general concept of "evaluating instruction".

This manual does not get into performance appraisal systems and procedures related to such personnel decisions as promotion and dismissal. The emphasis is on evaluating instruction for the purpose of improving the appropriateness and impact of training activities provided. We strongly advise that strategies for evaluating instruction should be developed in the context of strategies for staff development.

Methods of Evaluating Instruction

The choice of methods for evaluating instruction in community-based training programs is complicated by the politics of union contracts and inter-organizational relations. This is particularly so when community agencies arrange for instruction to be provided through other educational deliverers (community colleges, school boards). Methods of evaluating instruction have to be negotiated within the constraints imposed by teacher contracts and the limits of inter-organizational authority.

Here is a list of different methods of evaluating instruction used in community-based training programs:

Methods of Evaluating Instruction

- **student questionnaires (interim, final)**
- **student feedback (individual, group conferencing)**
- **self evaluation**
- **evaluation of curriculum plans (course outlines, lessons, tests, etc.)**
- **implementation records review (lessons, activity logs, assignments, etc.)**
- **examination of teacher credentials**
- **conferencing with supervisors**

The difference noted above between evaluating curriculum plans and evaluating implementation has to do with whether instruction is evaluated on the basis of what teachers say they are going to do or what they actually do.

Most programs use a variety of methods. Student questionnaires are the most common formal instrument for evaluating instruction in most community-based training programs.

There are other practical methods of evaluating instruction which are not commonly used in community-based training programs, such as peer observation and coaching, and self-evaluation with video and/or audio tapes.

If a community agency employs its own instructors, it is possible to integrate the evaluation of instruction with employee performance appraisal using systems of management-by-objectives. The Dellcrest Resource Centre publishes a useful manual about personnel perfomance appraisal called Impact Supervision.(1) Such systems are less feasible when sponsoring community agencies contract for instructional services with other organizations, and have limited supervisory authority over the instructors provided.

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[1] This and other useful manuals for human services organizations can be obtained from The Dellcrest Resource Centre, 1651 Sheppard Ave. W., Downsview, Ontario M3M 2X4.

The following range of standards for evaluating instruction are found in community-based training programs:

Standards for Evaluation of Instruction

- **student satisfaction/opinion**
- **match to curriculum plans**
- **instructor opinion/objectives**
- **administrator opinion**
- **program certification standards**
- **job relevance**
- **student learning styles/needs**

Student opinion is the most common, but should not be the only standard for evaluating instruction in community-based programs. The issue of establishing benchmarks for appropriate instruction requires careful consideration.

The evaluation of teaching methods in relation to student learning styles is a recent and promising innovation in adult training programs. This approach is reviewed later in this appendix.

A key methods issue in evaluating instruction is the difference between soliciting judgements about teacher performance and descriptions of teacher performance. Trainees in community-based programs are often asked to rate different aspects of instruction. Consider these two examples:

EXAMPLE 1: Did you get enough instructor feedback after tests and examinations?

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Very Good	**Good**	**Fair**	**Below Average**	**No Opinion**

EXAMPLE 2: The instructor provides helpful comments on student's progress

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Rarely				**Always**

The first example asks students to judge the quality of feedback provided, but reveals nothing about how much feedback was actually provided. The second example asks students to describe how often they get helpful feedback. Judgements about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable ratings are left to the program staff.

From a program evaluation standpoint, the second example is more informative. It results in concrete information about instruction which can be used as a basis for constructive discussion of local standards for appropriate instruction.

What to look at?

Table 23 lists some aspects of instruction commonly evaluated in community-based training programs. The list is derived from local questionnaires and interviews with program staff. In broad terms the list covers teacher qualifications, organization, teaching methods, communication with students, flexibility to individual student needs, job relevance and outcomes.

TABLE 23

COMMONLY EVALUATED FEATURES OF INSTRUCTION

QUALIFICATIONS
- subject expertise
- credentials
- experience with client group

ORGANIZATION
- curriculum plans
- in class presentation
- clarity of presentation
- preparedness

STUDENT ORIENTATION
- explanation of course objectives
- explanation of evaluation methods

LEARNING CLIMATE/MOTIVATION
- makes course interesting
- makes course stimulating
- enthusiasm for subject
- comfort level of students

STUDENT PARTICIPATION
- encouragement for student participation (questions, discussion, etc.)
- encouragement for student feedback
- frequency of opportunities for participation or feedback

FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS
- availability to help
- gives feedback on student progress
- gives feedback on tests

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
- adequacy of materials and equipment
- adequacy of facilities

TEACHING METHODS/SKILLS
- overall quality
- "helpfulness" to students
- use of varied methods of instruction
- use of specific methods of instruction (lecture, demonstration, etc.)
- use of equipment & materials
- appropriateness of methods to subject

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES
- methods adapted to student learning styles
- sensitivity to individual student needs

RECOMMENDATIONS
- "helpful" teaching practices
- recommendations for improvement
- free comments

STUDENT SATISFACTION
- quality of instruction
- what they "liked"

JOB RELEVANCE
- to work placements
- to future employment

OUTCOMES
- quantity of learning

Participants in an evaluation workshop held while developing this manual emphasized the following "important things to evaluate about instruction" in community-based programs:

- **APPROPRIATENESS OF TEACHING METHODS**
    - to the client group
    - to individual learning styles
- **TEACHING SKILLS**
    - clarity
    - enthusiasm
    - listening skills
    - general
- **JOB RELEVANCE**
    - of content actually delivered
- **IMPACT OF INSTRUCTION**
    - on identified need of trainees

APPENDIX D

LEARNING STYLES ASSESSMENT

General Considerations

Not all adults learn in the same way. They have different learning styles.* Three major learning styles have been defined by adult education researchers:

> **Mentally-centred learners - focusses on ideas and principles. Content relevance to learner's daily experience unnecessary. Relies on verbal skills for learning.**
>
> **Relationally-centred learners - learns by relating material to something already known in her/his experience. Relies on verbal skills for learning.**
>
> **Physically-centred learners - prefers concise presentation of material and immediate application. Learns by doing and by being given time for task completion.**

It is not known exactly why people's learning styles vary, but culture and gender play a part. Mental learners, for example, are more common in Britain than in North America. Physical learners are typical among Japanese and Chinese. In North America, relational learners comprise the majority (+/- 80%), followed by physical learners (10% - 15%) and mental learners (+/- 5%). North American women, in particular, tend to be relational learners.

These findings have important implications for community-based training. Instructional practices in public education have long been oriented towards the mentally-centred learning style. This orientation does not fit well the client population typically served by community-based organizations, which often consist of women, recent immigrants and adults who have not been successful in traditional school settings. Methods of instruction which are not adapted to the client's learning style are less likely to have the intended impact on client learning.

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* The source material for this explanation of adult learning styles is Carol Brooks, Instructor's Handbook: Working with Female Relational Learners in Technology and Trades Training. Fanshawe College, London, Ontario.

This presents three major challenges for instructors. One, to figure out the learning styles of students. Two, to decide what methods of instruction are most effective with different learning styles. And three, to actually implement instructional practices consistent with client learning styles.

From the standpoint of evaluating instruction, the issue is how to assess the match between client learning styles and methods of instruction.

Methods of Learning Styles Assessment

Adult educators have developed numerous learning styles assessment instruments. The important thing is not our ability to categorize people as mental, relational or physical learners. The important thing is to get a concrete picture of how they learn best. Some community-based training programs in Toronto use a "Learning Process Tool" developed by Dr. Carol Brooks of Fanshaw College, London, Ontario. This instrument can be found in her handbook for trainers.

The questionnaire is designed to help learners become more aware of their own learning styles, in addition to supplying information to teachers for use in planning instruction.

Identifying trainee learning styles is pointless if the findings are not used for planning and adapting instruction. The transformation of knowledge about trainee learning styles into concrete instructional strategies and practices may not be self-evident and simple to carry out. Teachers may need staff development assistance and administrative support to plan and implement changes in teaching methods based on learning styles information. Carol Brook's Instructors Manual: Working with Female Relational Learners in Technology and Trades Training is an excellent starting place for ideas about adapting instruction to relational and physical learners.

All this leads up to the issue of evaluating the appropriateness of instruction to identified client learning styles. Instruments for applying learning styles information to the evaluation of instruction are not yet well developed. We can suggest some guidelines and strategies.

1. It is probably wise to involve an adult education consultant in the initial selection or development oflearning style assessment instruments and instructional evaluation methods keyed to them.

2. The assessment of client learning styles, and the subsequent evaluation of instructional practices, has to take place early in the program if it is to be of any value for trainees and teachers alike.

3. In the absence of formal instruments for evaluating the match between learning styles findings and instructional plans, staff discussion is probably the most practical method.

   Bring the staff together to examine learning styles assessment results, to discuss implications for instructional practices, and to plan changes the staff believes are necessary. Then set up a tracking system for monitoring whether planned changes in instruction based on learning styles assessments are actually carried out as intended, and if not, why.

4. An alternative approach is to assess the learning styles of clients from successive programs for the purpose of developing a profile of the typical learner in a given program. With this information in hand, the staff could then specify ideal instructional practices for that type of client. Carol Brooks, for example, identified the following characteristics of "good instructors" for relational learners:

   * interacts with the student
   * goes back & forth from theory, demonstration and application
   * is sensitive to students' pacing
   * encourages discussion
   * pays individual attention to student's work
   * provides support & help with personal growth

   These types of characteristics can be converted into questionnaire items for evaluating instruction (see the sample instrument at the end of this Appendix).

   Dr. Brook's Manual lists many other "evaluable" characteristics of effective instructional practices for female relational learners. Program staff interested in developing an evaluation instrument of this sort should consult the adult education literature or consultants about the selection of items.

   The use of standardized criteria for measuring the fit between teaching practices and client learning styles depends on stable client popoulation characteristics. The approach only works, however, for a program that specializes in particular types of clients with homogeneous predictable learning styles.

LEARNING PROCESS TOOL FOR STUDENTS (from Carol Brooks, *Instructor's Manual: Working with Female Relational Learners in Technology and Trades Training*, 1986)

1. How do you usually learn best? (Check one)

___From working on my own and taking my own time

___From an instructor's lecture

___From an instructor who worked individually with me

___From working in a small group of people I feel comfortable with

___From seeing practical applications

___From following written directions

___From a small group of people with an instructor available to answer questions

___Other______________________________

2. If you have barriers to overcome that effect your learning, what are they? (Check as many as you want.)

___Financial

___Study skills not good

___Not really interested in doing this, but felt I had no choice

___Transportation

___Lack of energy

___No one to talk to about my decision to go back

___Daycare

___Lack of self confidence

___Family and/or friends not supportive of my decision to go back

___Physical and health problems

___Fears and anxiety

___Other______________

3. What kinds of skills do you need to learn or re-learn, to help you with your courses? (Check as many as you want.)

___How to read better

___How to express myself in speaking

___How to relax, stay calm

___How to evaluate or judge myself

___How to pay attention for longer periods of time

___How to solve problems

___How to concentrate

___How to value myself

___How to study

___How to stay aware that I belong in the programme

___How to follow someone else's directions

___How to make the course fun for myself

___How to express myself better in writing

___How to plan time for studying

___Other______________________________

4. What most helps your learning? (Check as many as you want. Rank in order of importance, 1-2-3-etc.)

___Having my own routine
___Talking with others while learning
___Being able to take my time
___Having someone to push me
___Having fun while learning
___Being able to practice what I'm learning
___Getting support and encouragement from instructors &/or people at home
___Other______________________________

5. Think of three things you have enjoyed learning; they can be anything and don't have to be related to school. What are they and why did you enjoy them?

1.____
2.____
3.____

6. What occurs to you first when you are learning something? (Check one)

___Remembering something you did once that was similar
___Thinking up a picture of how something ought to be
___Getting as much information as you can about what you have to learn

7. What is the easiest part, or stage, of learning for you? (Check one)

___Beginning something
___Working on the details and practicing
___Completing something
___Other____

8. What is the most difficult part, or stage, of learning for you? (Check one)

___Beginning something
___Working on the details and practicing
___Completing something
___Other____

9. In putting something together, I (Check one)

___Read instructions first, then look at the pieces
___Look at the pieces, then read the instructions
___Go back and forth between instructions and putting pieces together
___Look at the instructions but make up my own way of putting the pieces together
___Try to put pieces together first, then if it doesn't work, look at the instructions
___Other____

10. What are you most aware of when you are in class? (Check one)

___What I'm working on
___How I'm feeling that day
___What I don't understand
___How much I'm learning
___What my children are probably doing
___What my assignment will look like when I finish
___What is going on in the room around me
___Other______________________________

11. When you have worked on something and still haven't quite got it, how do you feel? (Check one)

___Restless
___Determined
___Stuck
___Patient
___Confused
___Challenged
___Impatient
___Depressed
___Other____

12. In what order do the following skills come in your learning process? (Rank 1-2-3)

___Thinking
___Assessing, evaluating
___Doing

13. How do you best learn mechanical or technical things?

___Tinkering
___Having someone explain it to me
___Reading instructions
___Watching someone work, then doing it myself
___Other____

14. How do you best learn ideas and theories? (Check one)

___Talking about them

___Working on applying them

___Reading about them

___Figuring out how they relate to me and my life

___Other____

15. When is it important to you to be able to talk about what you are doing?

____

____

____

16. How do you know when you have really learned something? (Check one)

___I feel comfortable doing it again

___I show or tell my family and friends what I can do

___I want to move on to learn something new

___Other____

APPENDIX E

WORK PLACEMENTS

General Considerations

Many community-based training programs include a work placement component as part of the program. Arrangements are made with host employers for trainees to get on-the-job training and experience.

Work placements typically extend over a period of weeks. They are sometimes concurrent with classroom training. Otherwise, they are scheduled after completion of classroom training. Work placement arrangements are the responsibility of Work Placement Coordinators or the Program Director. Supervision of trainee experiences on the work site is carried out jointly by program representatives and host employers.

Work placement evaluation in community-based programs has four basic components:

1. **Evaluation of worksite for future placement of trainees.**
2. **Evaluation of trainee performance on work placement.**
3. **Evaluation of work placement experience by trainee.**
4. **Evaluation of work placement arrangements by employer.**

These four topics are dealt with separately in some programs. Others develop instruments which cover multiple concerns, such as trainee performance and employer satisfaction with work placement arrangements. Here we review some common methods, standards, questions and issues for evaluating work placements in community-based training programs for each of the four topics listed above.

Evaluation of Worksite for Future Placements

The focus here is on the initial selection of host employers and worksites for work placements. Evaluation information from trainee performance appraisals, trainee and employer feedback during the program obviously feeds in to decisions about the continued use of host employers in future program cycles.

Assessing the match between the program, the employer, and the trainee is a joint responsibility. Many community-based programs use a variety of methods for evaluating potential worksites, which allow program staff, employers and students to each have a say in placement decisions. Common methods are as follows:

Program Staff

- **On-site interviews with prospective employers**
- **Employer questionnaires (e.g. applications for trainees)**
- **Checklists of expectations for host employers**

Employers

- **Dissemination of orientation materials explaining employer responsibilities for training and supervison**
- **Job interviews**

Trainees

- **Trainee selection of work placement preferences**
- **Job interviews**

Note that the use of formal evaluation instruments is limited mainly to the initial screening interviews and questionnaires for employers. Providing information about the program and expectations for host employers is a useful way to help potential employers "evaluate" whether they really want to get involved. Allowing trainees to choose from available work placements recognizes their right to select a job most closely aligned with their personal goals and interests. Requiring trainees and host employers to go through the process of a formal job interview gives both an opportunity to "evaluate" the match before making the final assignment. These combined activities make up the evaluation of worksites for future placements.

Community-based programs typically use a combination of standards, as well, when evaluating sites for future work placements. The following types of standards are used:

- **skill development potential of planned work experience (variety of tasks, challenge, adequacy of equipment, etc.)**
- **likelihood of future employment with host employer**
- **match of job description with program training objectives**
- **clarity of employer training plan**
- **match to student goals and abilities**
- **adequacy of on-site supervision planned**
- **accessibility of work site for trainees**
- **professionalism of host employer organization**
- **safety standards**

Table 24 summarizes the kinds of information gathered by community-based program staff for purposes of evaluating potential work placement sites.

Programs often try to locate host employers who are willing to work with trainees from successive training groups. Continuation of the relationship between the program and the employer depends on evaluations of past training experiences. These are reflected in measures of trainee performance, employer and trainee satisfaction as reviewed below.

TABLE 24

FEATURES COMMONLY EVALUATED IN SELECTING WORK PLACEMENT SITES

COMPANY BACKGROUND
- name
- type organization
- size (# employees)
- location & accessibility
- years in operation

EMPLOYMENT POTENTIAL
- current trends (layoffs, hiring)
- willingness to hire trainees after completion

JOB DESCRIPTION
- job title
- expected duties/tasks
- trainee requirements/ qualifications
- performance standards

ONSITE SUPERVISON
- supervisor(s) name
- supervisor(s) position
- level/type of supervision planned
- supervisor experience with training

ONSITE TRAINING
- past experience as host trainer
- current training practices for new employees

WORKING CONDITIONS
- days & hours of work
- adequacy of facilities & equipment
- safety requirements

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
- employment goals
- "abilities" to do the job
- "readiness" to do the job

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES
- willingness to teach
- provide adequate supervision
- provide opportunities to practice skills
- adhere to training plan
- give support & encouragement
- treat trainee as employee
- keep attendance record

Evaluation of Trainee Performance

There are three possible sources of evaluation of trainee performance on work placement:

1. **The host employer supervisor**
2. **The program staff (placement coordinator)**
3. **Trainees themselves.**

Host employer supervisors are the primary source of trainee performance evaluation. This information is usually recorded on questionnaires filled out by the employer, or by program placement coordinators after interviewing the employer. Procedures and forms for evaluating trainee performance on work placement normally permit trainees to review and comment on the evaluation. Independent evaluations of the work placement experience by trainees are gathered separately from these supervisor appraisals (see next part of this Appendix).

Evaluations of trainee performance on work placement serve three main purposes in community-based training programs:

1. **Education -- introduces trainees to formal employee evaluation procedures used in many organizations.**
2. **Trainee evaluation -- results in a "grade". Satisfactory performance required for successful completion of the program.**
3. **Program evaluation -- findings of trainee evaluations reviewed for program as a whole to determine effectiveness of work placement component and identify needs for improvement.**

The lack of staff and time to monitor work placements is a major difficulty in many community-based programs. This is one reason for the widespread reliance on employer questionnaires.

Most programs combine several methods of evaluating trainee performance, including one or more of the following:

Methods of Evaluating Work Experience

- **Employer questionnaires/ratings**
- **Structured employer interviews (face-to-face or telephone)**
- **Informal employer interviews (face-to-face or telephone)**
- **Program staff site visits (trainee observation, employer interviews)**
- **Program staff anecdotal records (employer contacts, trainee observations)**
- **Trainee written responses to supervisor evaluations**
- **Trainee logs (diaries, reports)**
- **Informal feedback from trainees**
- **Attendance records**

To give an example, the Dixon Hall STEP Program (Secretarial Training for Employment Program) uses four methods of evaluating trainee performance in work experience placements: (1) monthly telephone contacts between Work Experience Coordinator and employer supervisor; (2) on-site visits (twice) by Work Experience Coordinator and completion of evaluation form by supervisor; (3) monthly written reports by trainees about their work experience following a standard topic outline; (4) attendance records.

The timing of work placement performance appraisals is important. At least one formal performance appraisal should be done in the first few weeks, as well as at the end. This makes sure problems with the work placement are identified and dealt with early on, and provides a baseline for assessing participant progress.

Staff from community-based programs suggest that a settling in period of a few days or weeks is advisable before seeking trainee and employer views on the placement. They also suggest that employers should not be over burdened with formal written evaluation requirements. An effective solution is to combine regular telephone contacts (weekly, monthly) with a more formal middle and end of work placement evaluation.

A wide variety of trainee performance evaluation instruments and formats are used in community-based programs. Questionnaires that require supervisors to rate trainee peformance on work habits, technical and personal skills are the most common. Most include open-ended questions about trainee strengths, weaknesses, progress, and needs for improvement, as well.

Examples of work placement evaluation questionnaires are included at the end of this Appendix. Because rating type questionnaires are so widely used, a few tips about effective formats are reviewed here (see Section III.C Questionnaires for more detailed discussion).

Performance ratings often cover general work habits and job skills (e.g., productivity, quality of work, dependability, punctuality), in addition to the performance of specific tasks. When such dimensions are used, it is best to define them on the questionnaire. This makes the evaluation of trainee performance by different employers in different settings more consistent and comparable. Alternate methods of defining the meaning of general performance areas are illustrated in the examples at the end of this Appendix.

When ratings deal with the performance of specific technical skills, it is highly advisable to include a "not applicable" or "not performed" option. This serves the double purpose of preventing judgements about skills not practiced in the work place, and of informing program staff about the fit of the trainee's work experience to program objectives. Different formats are illustrated at the end of this Appendix.

Community-based program staff often use more than one standard to evaluate the findings of trainee work placement performance appraisals. Here is a list of common standards:

Standards for Work Experience Evaluation

- **Employer opinion/satisfaction**
- **Program coordinator opinion**
- **Student agreement**
- **Accomplishment of Terminal Performance Objectives**
- **Match of job description to actual duties performed**
- **Match of program goals/objectives to actual duties performed**
- **General job skills criteria (e.g., puntuality, dependability, productivity)**
- **Indicators of student progress**
- **Comparisons with other beginning employees**
- **Adequacy of on-site supervision**
- **Funder regulations (e.g., attendance requirements)**

Virtually all the work placement performance appraisal forms examined for this manual included space at the end for "supervisor comments" and "trainee comments", to be signed by both. The trainee's agreement and reaction to the evaluation is an important standard for judging the accuracy of the evaluation.

The effective use of trainee performance evaluation findings depends on the program staff's ability to interpret identified performance gaps. If a trainee, or a group of trainees, score low in some skill area, program staff need to be able to judge whether that gap is due to lack of preparation, poor performance on preparation tasks, lack of opportunity for practice in the workplace, attendance problems, etc. The staff's ability to make these kinds of judgements depends, in turn, on the maintenance of accurate implementation records of program training activities and student performance, and accurate information about duties actually carried out on the work placement.

Work placement performance appraisal questionnaires tend to cover a wide range of performance areas. Table 25 lists some of those commonly included.

An important difference in the work placement performance instruments collected and examined in developing this manual is whether the areas of performance measured are keyed to explicit skills objectives in the program. Extreme caution is advised in using instruments that assess trainee performance on general job skills and work habits if program staff are not able to make connections between these performance indicators and program training activities.

Feedback to program instructors is an important consideration in interpreting and using findings from work placement performance evaluations. Work placement evaluations are usually gathered or carried out by a single person, either an agency program director or work placement coordinator. Opportunities need to be set up for communicating evaluation findings back to teaching staff.

In most of the programs consulted while developing this manual, communication about work placement evaluations is informal. It typically focusses on dealing with individual trainee problems and assigning individual trainee grades. The structured use of work placement performance evaluation findings for the purpose of program evaluation is an underused source of information for program improvement.

TABLE 25

COMMONLY EVALUATED AREAS OF WORK PLACEMENT PERFORMANCE

QUALITY OF WORK
- accuracy
- technical proficiency

PRODUCTIVITY
- quantity of work
- organization of work time & materials

ADAPTABILITY
- ability to learn new skills
- ability to transfer skills to new tasks

TECHNICAL SKILLS PERFORMANCE
- use of program related technical skills
- duties performed
- skill levels

DEPENDABILITY
- attendance
- punctuality
- task completion
- ability to follow instructions

INITIATIVE
- ability to work independently
- willingness to take on responsibility

COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS
- relations with supervisor
- relations with co-workers
- ability to understand & make self understood (oral/written)

ATTITUDE
- motivation to work
- interest in work
- general attitude to work
- emotional stability under pressure

APPEARANCE
- grooming
- dress
- fitness

ACCEPTANCE OF SUPERVISION
- suggestions
- criticisms

JOB SEARCH SKILLS
- resume quality
- interview skills

SAFETY AWARENESS

PROGRESS/OUTCOMES
- strengths
- weaknesses
- improvements made
- improvements needed
- overall performance rating
- future performance goals
- future employment potential

FREE COMMENTS
- supervisor
- trainee

Trainee Evaluation of Work Placement

Evaluation of work placements does not stop with supervisor evaluations of trainee performance. Most community-based programs provide opportunities for trainees to comment on the effectiveness of their work placement experiences.

There are three ways program staff solicit trainee feedback about work placement training:

Trainee Self-Evaluation Methods

* **Trainee questionnaires**
* **Trainee logs (diaries, reports, activity logs)**
* **Informal trainee feedback**

Many programs combine all three methods. Interim and end of the program questionnaires, for example, might be combined witha requirement for trainees to write and turn in weekly diaries about their work placement experiences. Additional opportunities for individual and group feedback could be worked in to personal counselling or life skills sessions.

Trainee questionnaires are the most common means of getting trainees to formally evaluate their work placement experiences. Trainee questionnaires tend to favor open-ended question formats.

The use of trainee logs (diaries, reports, activity sheets) to document what trainees are doing on work placement, the difficulties and satisfactions they encounter, and their feelings about their situation is quite common. Trainee logs are not used just for evaluation purposes. They are used to help trainees reflect on their learning and personal adjustment to the work place (see Section III.F, Logs, for detailed discussion).

Some programs have found it useful to integrate trainee logs with other program components. A couple of the programs consulted in developing this manual, for example, require trainees to submit written reports about their work placement experiences as English Upgrading assignments. Some programs also provide opportunities for trainees to discuss problems and insights identified in their logs in Life Skills classes.

Information from trainee logs may figure into the grading of participant performance on work placement. It rarely figures into final evaluation reports. Results of trainee evaluations of work placements in program evaluation reports are often limited to questionnaire data. The use of trainee log data for program evaluation is a relatively untapped resource.

The following standards are often incorporated into trainee evaluations of work placement experiences:

Standards for Self-Evaluation of Work Experience

- **Trainee opinion/satisfaction**
- **Match of skills performed to program objectives**
- **Match of skills performed to job description**
- **Match of training & supervision provided to employer training plan**
- **Match of skills & training to trainee expectations**

Table 26 summarizes features of work placement experiences commonly evaluated through trainee questionnaires, logs and feedback.

TABLE 26

FOCUS OF STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF WORK PLACEMENT EXPERIENCES

SKILLS PERFORMANCE
- technical skills used
- personal skills used
- tasks performed
- responsibilities given

TRAINING
- description of training provided
- technical training needs
- personal training needs
- task performance needs

JOB DIFFICULTY
- what does best
- most difficult parts
- level of challenge

SUPERVISION
- description of employer supervision
- adequacy of employer supervison
- feedback on performance evaluations
- fairness of evaluation procedures
- helpfulness of evaluation procedures

EMPLOYER ROLE
- understanding of placement objectives
- explanation of trainee duties/responsibilities

ATTITUDES
- "likes" about the job
- feelings about work placement
- confidence in ability to do the job

FIT W/ EXPECTATIONS
- w/ employer job description
- w/ training plan
- w/ personal expectations
- w/ course material

OUTCOMES
- overall impact on trainee
- skills improvement
- new skills development
- overall satisfaction with placement experience
- future employment prospects with host employer

RECOMMENDATIONS
- for changing job description
- for improving work placement component
- open comments

Employer Evaluation of Work Placement Component

Host employers are often asked to comment on the benefits, drawbacks and needs for improvement of work experience arrangements. Such questions are sometimes raised at the end of trainee performance evaluation instruments. Otherwise, they are the topic of separate questionnaires.

Employer questionnaires are the instrument of choice. These questionnaires are usually administered upon completion of a work placement cycle for each trainee group. They are filled out by supervisors at the work placement site. In contrast to performance appraisal instruments, employer questionnaires usually include predominance of open-ended response items. Sample questionnaires are included at the end of this Appendix.

Employer opinion/satisfaction is the evaluation standard for these instruments. Depending on the questions, however, host employers may be asked to judge the benefits of work placements to their organization or to the trainees.

Employer evaluations of work placement arrangements serve three main purposes for community-based program staff:

1. **Evaluate current program training practices.**
2. **Suggest improvements in current work placement arrangements.**
3. **Identify host employer candidates for future trainees.**

The range of topics commonly covered in employer work placement questionnaires is summarized in Table 27.

TABLE 27

FOCUS OF EMPLOYER EVALUATIONS OF WORK PLACEMENT COMPONENTS

WORK PLACEMENT OUTCOMES
- benefits/helpfulness to employer
- benefits/helpfulness to trainee
- assessment of overall worth of project

WORK PLACEMENT ORGANIZATION
- general organization of work placements
- appropriateness of work placement schedule
- adequacy of support from the program

SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES
- usefulness of performance evaluation forms
- timing/number of program staff site visits
- needs for information about trainees
- open comments

KNOWLEDGE OF PROGRAM
- about program staff
- about agency training

FUTURE TRAINING ROLE
- willingness to train future trainees
- names of other host employer candidates

TRAINEE EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS
- within host employer organization
- within other organizations

RECOMMENDATIONS
- difficulties with program
- changes in arrangements
- changes in trainee job descriptions
- changes in trainee qualifications
- open comments

APPENDIX F

TRAINEE PERFORMANCE

General Considerations

Just how do community-based training program staff evaluate participant performance? The answer is as varied as the programs themselves. Even within a program, methods of trainee performance evaluation are likely to vary from course to course.

Despite this variation, there are some cross-program commonalities in strategies for evaluating trainee performance. These are summarized as follows:

1. **Trainee performance is measured for all aspects of job readiness (technical, academic, attitudes, life skills, job search skills).**
2. **Trainee performance is measured continuously during the program.**
3. **Trainee performance is measured in multiple ways.**
4. **Trainee's participate in the evaluation of their own performance.**
5. **Trainee perfomrance is judged against multiple standards.**

Community-based programs offer more than just technical training to their clients, including such services as academic upgrading, life skills training, counseling and job search training. Given this concern with the "whole person", program staff endeavor to measure trainee performance holistically across all aspects of job readiness (technical skills, academic level, work attitudes and habits, psychological ad social adjustment, life skills, etc.)

Community-based programs are ususally highly committed to meeting their clients' needs for training and support sevices. As a result, efforts are made to monitor trainee performance continuously during the program, not just to measure outcomes at the end. Feedback to trainees, with appropriate interventions to compensate for difficulties identified, are provided throughout the program. Formal performance appraisals and feedback sessions with individual trainees take place at scheduled intervals (e.g., monthly, 6 weeks, 3 months) during the program.

Multiple methods of measuring trainee performance are used for individual courses and for the program as a whole. Here is a list of ways often used by community-based training program staff to assess trainee performance.

Methods of Trainee Performance Evaluation

* **Performance ratings by teachers & employers**
* **Self evaluation ratings/questionnaires by students**
* **Tests of skills or knowledge**
* **Assignments and exercises**
* **Oral presentations**
* **Teacher observation**
* **Anecdotal records of teachers**
* **Student journals**
* **Learning contracts**
* **Teacher/student conferencing**
* **Individual counseling**
* **Teacher/teacher conferencing**
* **Attendance and participation**

Because of the performance orientation of most training programs, teachers rely much less on paper and paper tests of knowledge than on practical assignments, exercises and presentations which require trainees to demonstrate what they can do. This is particularly so for life skills and job search skills.

A hallmark of community-based training programs is that trainees participate in the evaluation of their own performance. Trainee self-evaluation instruments (questionnaires, ratings) are often used in combination with periodic teacher/student conferences. At these meetings, teachers review their assessments of the trainee's performance (and employer evaluations); trainee's share their self-appraisals; and plans to compensate for any difficulties noted are made.

These plans are sometimes concretized in the form of written "learning contracts", in which the trainee commits herself to work on specific goals.

Other ways of involving trainees in evaluating their own performance include student journals and individual counseling. Journals are usually done in the context of life skills training. Students reflect and write about their experiences and progress in the program (see Section III.F Logs). Journals are usually turned in to program staff for review and comment on a regular basis (weekly, biweekly).

This situation is associated with the fact that community-based programs are often set up to serve clients who do not have the pre-requisite educational or work experience normally expected for participants in these courses. In effect, the only practical alternative is to create unique standards and certificates based on the actual performance of the kinds of clients served.

The use of grades in evaluating participant performance in community-based programs is associated with programs which lead to certificates from institutions such as community colleges. Pass/fail judgements are equally common, particularly for courses such as life skills and job search skills.

In judging trainee performance, many community-based programs shift focus for different phases of the program. Program staff are likely to focus initially on participant progress in dealing with personal barriers to participation in training and future work (e.g., day care arrangements, family responsibilities, work habits -- attendance, appearance).

In terms of technical skills, the emphasis early in the program is usually on quality and accuracy of work. Over time, the focus and pressure shifts to assessing the quantity of work, as well. Timed skills tests and production standards are more likely to be used towards the middle and end of training than at the beginning.

APPENDIX G

ACCESS TO SERVICES

General Considerations

In addition to technical training and basic academic upgrading, community-based training programs usually provide **support services**. Support services are intended to reduce the difficulties trainees have with **access to training**, and **access to employment**.

Community-based programs typically provide a wide variety of support services, including the following:

ACCESS TO TRAINING

- **personal counselling**
- **life skills training**
- **extra tutoring**
- **assistance w/ linguistic difficulties (ESL, translation help)**
- **referral to other agencies**
- **advocacy on behalf of trainee**
- **assisting w/ access to income supports (training allowances, day care subsidies, etc.)**

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

- **personal counselling**
- **vocational counselling**
- **life skills training**
- **job search training**
- **ESL instruction**
- **vocational exploration**
- **referral to other agencies**
- **advocacy of behalf of trainee**
- **assisting w/ access to income supports (day care subsidies, further training money)**
- **job placement assistance**

Support services are usually delivered by community agency staff. Who does it depends on a combination of factors, such as agency size, staff availability, qualifications and job descriptions. Program directors, placement coordinators, career counselors, life skills coaches, and academic teachers (ESL, English) are all likely to be involved in the delivery of support services.

Support services are usually integrated into the training program and timetable. They are not treated as optional services to be used at the discretion of each trainee.

Optional support services may be available from training partners in jointly-delivered programs. Community college job placement services are a good example. Use of these additional services is usually not an integrated part of the program.

Support services are delivered in both individual and group formats, as listed:

INDIVIDUAL SERVICES

- **personal/vocational counselling**
- **referral/advocacy**
- **job placement**
- **accessing income support**
- **tutoring**

GROUP SERVICES

- **life skills training**
- **job search training**
- **vocational explorations**
- **English-as-Second Language**

Group services may be delivered separately or in combination with other training components. Some programs provide separate life skills, job search and vocational exploration courses (or workshops). Others organize these topics as units or lessons within a single course under a single trainer. Still others integrate topics such as life skills and job search skills (resume preparation, job interview skills) into English-as-a-Second Language or English Upgrading courses.

Support services provided in a course or workshop format tend to get evaluated in much the same way as core technical and academic courses. The suggestions provided in Appendix B (Evaluating Course Content and Materials) and Appendix C (Evaluating Instruction) are equally relevant to the evaluation of ESL instruction, job search skills courses and vocational explorations courses.

Here we focus in three main areas of support services:

1. **Assessing barriers to participation and employment**
2. **Evaluating counseling services**
3. **Evaluating Life Skills courses**

For each area we consider methods and criteria for evaluation.

This Appendix does not specifically cover the evaluation of job placement services, nor of referral and advocacy services. These two important areas of support services are rarely included in local program evaluations. If you are interested in doing so, the Evaluation Planning Guide (Section II) and methods (Sections III and IV) parts of this manual will aid you in planning and carrying out your evaluation.

Assessing Barriers to Participation and Employment

The identification of barriers to trainee participation and employment begins during the initial screening and selection process (see Appendix A). It continues in the context of support services such as individual counseling and life skills classes. The identification of barriers to participation and employment is routinely coupled with interventions to help trainees overcome the difficulties they are dealing with.

Trainee needs for support services to deal with barriers to training and employment are usually determined by a combination of **methods**:

Methods of Evaluating Barriers to Access

- **trainee questionnaires (screening, during program, end-of-program)**
- **personal interviews (screening, counseling)**
- **observation of trainees by staff**
- **trainee feedback (individual, group)**
- **trainee logs/journals**
- **trainee performance appraisal**
- **consultation with outside agency counsellors**

Program staff tend to apply three basic **standards** in assessing the need for support services interventions.

Standards for Evaluating Barriers to Access

- **degree of impact on client participation in training or on ability to get a job**

- **client effectiveness/progress in dealing with the problem**

- **availability of program or outside support services to help with client needs**

Table 28 lists the kinds of barriers to participation in training and to employability which community-based program staff often gather information about.

Information about factors hindering access to training and employment is normally used to help individual trainees. That kind of information could be used for the overall evaluation of program support services, as well, using the techniques for analysis described in Section IV of this manual.

TABLE 28

COMMONLY ASSESSED BARRIERS TO TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

INCOME LEVEL/SOURCES

LINGUISTIC/CULTURAL DIFFICULTIES

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES & PROBLEMS

HOUSING

LOCATION OF TRAINING & WORK

TRANSPORTATION

PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES

FACILITIES/EQUIPMENT ACCESSIBLE TO PHYSICALLY DISABLED

LOW SELF-ESTEEM

DRUG/ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

WORK HABITS & APPEARANCE

UNREALISTIC CAREER OR EDUCATIONAL GOALS

POOR JOB SEARCH SKILLS (FINDING INFORMATION, RESUME PREPARATION, JOB INTERVIEWS, ETC.)

LACK OF APPROPRIATE EDUCATION

LACK OF APPROPRIATE WORK EXPERIENCE

Vocational and Personal Counselling

Personal and vocational counselling is an important component of most community-based training programs.

Counselling services are usually provided by the sponsoring community agency. Additional counselling services may be provided to individual trainees by other voluntary or government social services agencies, and by other training partners (community colleges, school boards).

Counselling is another community-based training component which is often missed or only superficially considered in local program evaluations. Trainee questionnaires are the most common formal method of evaluating the use and effects of counselling services. Otherwise, evaluation of counselling services takes place mainly through staff discussion and trainee feedback.

Table 29 summarizes the kinds of information local program staff tend to seek when they evaluate their counselling services.
The brevity of this list reflects the current state of evaluation of counseling services in community-based training programs. If you choose to do an in depth evaluation of your counselling services, you will no doubt wish to expand on the topics listed.

TABLE 29

COMMONLY EVALUATED FEATURES OF COUNSELLING SERVICES

COUNSELLING NEED OF TRAINEES
- personal
- vocational
- educational

STAFFING
- staff qualifications
- clarity of staff roles & responsibilities
- use of trainees to counsel each other

SCHEDULING & PROGRAM SUPPORT
- individual counselling
- group counselling
- time & space availability
- time of day/week scheduled

COUNSELLING PURPOSES
- referral
- learning/enabling process for trainees

COORDINATION W/ OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES
- staff awareness if social services & how to access
- access/use of training partner support services
- use of other agency support services
- inter-agency communication & cooperation

USE OF COUNSELLING SERVICES
- trainee awareness of
- frequency of use

COUNSELLING OUTCOMES
- perceived "helpfulness" of counseling on part of trainees
- follow through on personal goals/plans
- success in coping w/ barriers to work & further training
- effects on client self-confidence
- effects on client social skills for work
- effects on punctuality & attendance
- job placement & retention
- client use of social services (reduced dependency, appropriate use)

Life Skills Training

The YWCA of Metropolitan Toronto defines **Life Skills training** as follows:

> **"Life Skills can be defined as an experiential approach to learning which uses structured group experiences to help clients develop specific practical skills needed in everyday living. It is composed of a series of lessons that are geared to individual and group needs in the five areas relating to self, family, community, lesisure and job. Using such techniques as role-playing, experiential exercises, small group discussions, audio-visual aids and field trips, clients experience new ways of managing their lives."**[1]

The kinds of topics covered under the five areas[2] include:

SELF: **Self Experience** (personal strengths & weaknesses, setting personal goals, etc.)

Working with Others (meeting & relating to others, giving & receiving feedback, etc.)

Reasoning Skills (analyzing tasks, rational approach to problems, etc.)

FAMILY: **The Human Condition** (stigma, rights & responsibilities, money, etc.)

The Family & You (family relationships, single parents, housing, etc.)

COMMUNITY: (Community resources, police, etc.)

JOB: **Vocational Exploration** (employment preferences, job skill requirements, etc.)

Job Search Skills (applications, resumes, interviews, career planning, etc.)

LEISURE: (relaxation, sports, etc.)

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[1] 1986/87 "Life SKills Coach Training". Brochure. YWCA of Metropolitan Toronto.

[2] Life Skills DACUM Participation Chart. Source unknown.

In community-based training programs Life Skills are taught as a distinct course, as a series of workshops, or in conjunction with English (upgrading or ESL).

Evaluation of Life Skills training occurs at the participant performance and course evaluation levels. Assessment of trainee performance in Life Skills courses usually results in a pass/fail judgement, rather than a grade. Participant performance is judged on the basis of a combination of measures, including:

- **attendance & participation**
- **trainee goals & action plans**
- **oral presentations**
- **trainee journals**
- **job search assignments & exercises (resumes, practice interview, etc.)**
- **vocational research assignments**
- **trainee feedback**
- **teacher observation & anecdotal records**

Life Skills training sessions ideally have a built-in course evaluation component. Each class begins with the identification and agreement on objectives for that session. The session concludes with group evaluation and feedback on whether and how well those objectives were fulfilled.

Beyond that, there are no standard models for evaluating Life Skills programs as a whole. The field of Life Skills training is still too new to have evolved a well developed set of uniform standards for evaluating the overall quality and effectiveness of a program. Many programs use the same course and instructor evaluation instruments to evaluate Life Skills training as they do for technical and academic courses.

Consultations with community-based program Life Skills teachers while developing this manual suggest that the quality and effectiveness of Life Skills programs depends on the presence of certain special features. These are listed here in the spirit of stimulating local interest in ways of looking at the overall effectivness of Life Skills training.

SOME KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS

1. **Curriculum flexibility** to the needs and characteristics of each training group. Effective Life Skills programs do not have a rigidly "fixed" curriculum.

2. **Curriculum relevance** to the needs of each training group. Effective Life Skills programs are based on ongoing assessment of the individual and group needs of trainees.

3. **Completeness of curriculum** planned and delivered. While the choice of topics will vary for different training groups, an effective Life Skills program will provide opportunities for assessment and response to trainee needs in all 5 major areas--self, family, job, community and leisure.

4. **Curriculum development/planning process** which is reproduced with each training group, and which includes both student input and staff observation.

5. **Student-to-student counseling**. Opportunities are provided for students to assist each other in finding solutions to practical problems.

6. **Life Skills session evaluations**, including the initial identification of session objectives with the trainees, and student feedback (oral and/or written) at the end of each session, are built into the program.

7 **Life Skills teacher qualifications and competencies**. Specific training for Life Skills coaches is available from places like the YWCA and community colleges. Associations of Life Skills trainers are beginning to evolve. The assignment of responsibility for Life Skills to staff who have not benefited from specific training in this field is not advisable.

The above characteristics of effective Life Skills programs suggest a framework of dimensions for evaluating the overall quality of Life Skills programs.

Beyond assessment of program characteristics, of course, the evaluation of Life Skills programs should also look at participant outcomes. A list of participant outcomes often valued in Life Skills offered by community-based training programs concludes this Appendix. This list is tentative and offered in the spirit of encouraging constructive local evaluation of this vital component of community-based training programs.

OUTCOMES OF LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

- **Increased self-confidence/assertiveness**
- **Impact on attendance for training & work**
- **Impact on problem solving behaviors**
- **Impact on personal goal setting/planning**
- **Impact on job search skills**
- **Impact on social skills in workplace**
- **Ability to find and keep a job**

APPENDIX H

COMPLETION OUTCOMES

General Considerations

Completion outcomes are the immediate results of training. They are measured at the point when trainees leave the program. Long-term outcomes, measured months or years after trainees leave the program, are summarized in Appendix I, Follow-up Studies.

In the search for program effects, community-based program staff do not limit consideration only to trainees who complete the entire program. Outcome data are also gathered about drop outs and partial completers (i.e., trainees who satisfactorily finish some parts of the program, but not others).

From a program evaluation standpoint, completers and drop outs include both positive and negative terminations. Positive terminations are clients who complete or leave the program and take a training related job, or enrol in further training or education.

Negative terminations are those who complete or drop out and remain unemployed and do not seek further education. Most programs gather information about the reasons for trainee withdrawals as well as the number that drop out.

A third category falls somewhere in between. It consists of trainees who take jobs unrelated to the occupational focus of the program, in particular, jobs that are low paying and offer little opportunity for advancement.

A program that helps a previously unemployed person get a job cannot be deemed unsucessful simply because the client takes an unrelated job. For many community-based programs, "training relatedness" is secondary to the basic goals of stable employment, increased economic independence, self-confidence and motivation to work.

From the client-centred perspective of many community-based programs, "successful" completion is also a question of client goals and abilities. Is the trainee fulfilling ehr personal vocational or educational goals? Has the trainee reached a skill level or taken a job consistent with her actual abilities.

Training programs for the physically disabled, for example, hesitate to label clients whose disabilities prevent them from accomplishing all technical performance objectives as "failures". The more important question is whether trainees develop to their full potential in response to the training and support services the program is able to provide.

As funded projects, community-based programs are ordinarily expected to calculate and report cost outcomes, as well as client outcomes. Training costs are usually calculated per trainee enrolled, per completion and per initial job placement.

Table 30 summarizes the kinds of completion outcomes measured by many community-based training programs. The list is based on interviews with people involved in these programs, on inspection of local program evaluation instruments, and on review of the occupational training literature.

Completion outcomes are not a sufficient measure of program success. All trainees who finish the program will not immediately find a job or enrol in further educational opportunities. Trainees who move directly into jobs may not keep them. The appropriateness of training may not become clear until the graduate has been working for a while. Follow-up studies are critical to the overall evaluation of program outcomes. Follow-up studies are the topic of Appendix I.

TABLE 30
FREQUENTLY MEASURED COMPLETION OUTCOMES

TRAINEE COMPLETION RATES
- # completing all program requirements
- # drop outs
- # completing some program requirements

WITHDRAWALS
- # drop outs
- withdrawal dates
- reasons for withdrawal

GRADES
- per course
- cumulative grade point (all courses)
- pass/fail

GRADUATION CREDENTIALS
- certificates of completion
- letters of completion

EXIT LEVELS
- terminal performance on program performance

JOB READINESS
- technical skills
- academic preparation
- psychological adjustment
- work habits
- life and job search skills

ATTITUDES
- self-esteem, self-confidence
- motivation to work
- motivation to further education

WORK HABITS
- punctuality, attendance
- acceptance of supervision & direction
- cooperation w/ co-workers
- personal appearance

PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS
- in work situation
- in family situation

EMPLOYMENT
- initial placement in job
- type job
- relation to training
- salary

UNEMPLOYMENT
- unemployed, actively searching
- unemployed, not searching
- type/# of applications made
- reasons for unemployment

FURTHER EDUCATION
- readiness for further education
- plans for further education

INCOME LEVEL/SOURCES
- changes in income level & sources
- changes in use of social assistance
- initial growth in earning potential

TRAINEE SATISFACTION
- w/ program delivered
- w/ program outcomes

FUTURE PLANS
- employment
- training
- education
- other

UNEXPECTED RESULTS
- open-ended

APPENDIX I

FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

General Considerations

Information about what happens to trainees after they leave the program is highly valued by community-based program staff. Many regard follow-up studies as the most valid measure of program effectiveness.

Follow-up studies can be directed to program graduates, to employers of program graduates, or to both. Follow-up surveys of trainees are far more common than employer surveys. For that reason, this Appendix limits consideration to trainee follow-up instruments.

The main uses of follow-up studies are as follows:

1) **provide information about program outcomes for external accountability to funders, boards of directors, community, etc.**

2) **provide information about program outcomes to support funding requests**

3) **internal evaluation of program effectiveness (post-program outcomes for clients)**

4) **internal evaluation for program improvement (needs for change arising from program outcomes)**

Additional uses of follow-up study data include the improvement of vocational counseling services (more accurate information about employment prospects), recruitment (advertise realistic placement expectations), and building staff morale.

Local project deliverers are sometimes required by funders to carry out follow-up studies. The Canadian Job Development Program, for example, requires local agencies to do a minimum of 3 month, and 6 or 12 month followup studies. Other local agency programs do follow-ups out of their own sense of need.

Ideally, follow-up studies should be carried out on a regular basis with all or a sample of graduates from each program training cycle. Unless they are are required and funded to do so, most community-based programs do not carry out follow-up studies on a regular basis. One-shot or occasional follow-up studies are the more typical scenario.

The timing of follow-up studies is subject to wide variation. Longitudinal studies involving successive follow-ups with the same group of trainees are ideal. The Job Development Program requirement of 3 month, plus 6 or 12 month follow-ups is a good example of longitudinal follow-up studies. Again, many local agencies lack the resources to carry out extensive follow-ups.

Single follow-up studies are more common. Among the agencies consulted for this manual, some do follow-ups within one to three months of program completion. Others schedule them every two or three years, so that the sample of former trainees surveyed includes a mix of recent and distant graduates.

Specialists in the evaluation of occupational training programs generally agree that less than three months is not enough time to get a valid measure of program outcomes for clients. It does provide a good baseline for subsequent measures. For one-shot follow-ups, our advice is to hold off until 6 months or a year. The use of three month follow-ups is more appropriate as the first stage of a longitudinal study of program graduates.

For highly flexible programs that undergo substantial changes from one training group to the next, there is a danger ofletting too much time lapse between program completion and the collection of follow-up information. Recommendations for change may not be relevant to the program in its altered form.

Methods of Doing Follow-up Studies of Program Graduates

Four methods of getting follow-up data from trainees include:

* **Personal interviews**
* **Telephone interviews**
* **Questionnaires**
* **Informal contacts with program graduates**

The choice of follow-up study method need not be an either/or decision. Several programs consulted in developing this manual used standardized evaluation instruments which could be completed either as an interview or as a questionnaire.

Interviews are the method of choice. Personal contact is likely to elicit a higher response rate than mail-out surveys. Telephone interviews are most common. Closed response question formats are easier to use in telephone interview situations

(Section III.B, III.C). Open-ended questions are needed as well, however, to get at unexpected outcomes and the recommendations of former trainees for program change.

Many community agencies have close relationships with the communities they serve. Staff are likely to have occasional informal contacts with some program graduates (or their friends) after completion. Ex-trainees may also return for job placement help weeks or months after completion. Follow-up logs or records of informal information about the status of program graduates are unlikely to reach a wide enough sample of the graduates to substitute for a formal follow-up study.

Who does the follow-ups is a major practical issue. It depends on funder requirements and local resources. Funders sometimes require "third party" evaluations by persons other than program staff. This does not mean, however, that external consultants should be given a free hand in designing and carrying out the follow-up studies. Responsibility for determining what gets asked from whom and by what means still rests with the local evaluation team.

When funders require follow-up studies, the budget is more likely to include money specifically for program evaluation. That makes it easier to build responsibility for carrying out follow-up studies into someone's job description (program managers, work placement coordinators, vocational counsellors).

When follow-up studies are mandated locally on an occasional basis, responsibility for carrying them out is typically farmed out to external consultants. Regular staff often do not see themselves as having the time to do it. The "burden" of doing a follow-up study increases with the amount of time that elapses between studies, as the number of graduates grows.

The execution of ongoing follow-up studies of program graduates is probably more feasible than staff in many programs suppose. For small and large programs alike, the number of people to be contacted can be kept more manageable by doing follow-ups with each group of trainees, rather than waiting until there are so many that the task becomes a major project. With an appropriate sampling strategy, programs training large numbers of clients (30 or more per cycle) should not have to contact all graduates to make reasonable judgements about client outcomes and their relation to the program (see sampling, Section II.F).

A key issue is building responsibility and time for managing or carrying out follow-up studies into the job description of particular program staff. The perceived "costs" for staff diminish when follow-up studies are treated as part of the job rather than something added-on.

Contacting and getting responses from graduates of community-based training programs can be a problem. Follow-up studies have to contend with the fact that people move, often without forwarding addresses, that phones get changed or disconnected, and that people may be reluctant to respond to requests for information about their personal lives.

Use of the following procedures will make it easier for program staff to contact graduates, and will increase the number of responses to follow-up requests.

1. Provide orientation during training. Tell trainees about follow-up study plans before they graduate. Tell them why it's being done and what method will be used. Go over the kinds of questions they will be asked.
2. Emphasize the importance of the information for the program. Stress how it contributes to the program. The study is not to "check on" clients.
3. Get follow-up addresses/phone numbers. Get updated information about how to contact trainees before they leave. Ask for addresses of one or two close friends or relatives, as well.
4. Build a network of graduates. Newsletters, reunions, etc.
5. Send "alert letters". Send letters ahead of time to remind graduates of the purpose of the study, who and how they will be contacted, the method to be used etc. It should be signed by the program manager or a former teacher (see example at end of this Appendix).
6. Provide assurances of confidentiality in the orientation and introductory letters.
7. Include a cover letter with questionnaires, abain explaining the purpose, improtance and confidentiality of the survey.
8. Try to schedule interviews at the respondent's convenience.

The overall guideline is to use an individual and personal approach. Use conversational language for introductory letters, questionnaires and interview questions. Try to avoid making the study sound and feel like an official inquiry.

Followup studies usually incorporate several evaluation standards. Some of the most common are as follows:

Evaluation Standards for Follow-up Studies

- **Success in getting a job**
- **Gain in earnings**
- **Success in continuing education**
- **Usefulness of training to current situation (job, education)**
- **Trainee opinion/satisfaction**
- **Accomplishment of personal goals**
- **Appropriateness of outcome to trainee capabilities**
- **Consensus with other information sources (trainees, staff, employers, advisory boards)**

Appendix H offers a detailed listing of outcomes standards used by community-based program staff to judge the impact of training.

What to look at?

Table 31 summarizes the categories of information targeted in trainee followup questionnaires and interviews reviewed for this manual. No instrument should try to cover all this ground. The list depicts the range of possible information objectives.

The usefulness of follow-up data depends on the program staff's ability to connect follow-up findings to other information about the program and its participants. Some of the more common comparisons or correlations examined include the following:

- **Participant age and sex**
- **Length of stay in the program (i.e., drop outs, completers)**
- **Completion date of training**
- **Pre/post-program employment status**
- **Pre/post-program income status**
- **Skill level vis a vis training objectives**
- **Duties vis a vis training objectives**
- **Comparisons to views of other program stakeholders (current trainees, staff, employers, advisory committees)**

TABLE 31
INFORMATION COMMONLY GATHERED IN FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

BACKGROUND
- date left program
- age & sex
- family data (spouse, kids)
- cultural data (birthplace, languages)

EMPLOYMENT STATUS
- employed/unemployed
- length of time
- full/part-time

JOB SEARCH
- if looking for work
- how found/seeking work (sources of info/help)
- length of time til placement
- problems experienced
- if hired by work placement employer

JOB INFORMATION
- place(s) of employment
- kind of employment (job title)
- duties
- promotions (earned, potential)

JOB STABILITY
- # job changes
- reasons for changes
- length of employment

FINANCIAL SITUATION
- current wage/salary
- pre/post-program changes in wage/salary
- post-program increases in wage/salary
- sources of income
- pre/post program changes in income sources

CURRICULUM INFORMATION
- relatedness of training to current situation
- adequacy of preparation for current status
- difficulty level of training
- gaps in preparation
- difficulties on job

WORK ATTITUDES
- satisfaction with job
- commitment to work
- general attitude to work

FURTHER EDUCATION
- education activities
- education plans
- education focus
- relationship to training
- place of education

PROGRAM BENEFITS
- ability to get a job
- skill development (technical/personal)
- job/education relevance
- economic betterment
- improved opportunities (job/education)
- self confidence
- social benefits (family well being, social network, community)

RECOMMENDATIONS
- useful parts of program
- changes in program
- willingness to recommend program to others
- open comments

FOLLOW-UP STUDY CRITIQUE
- clarity/difficulty of questions
- completeness
- method
- reaction to

Participants in an evaluation workshop organized during the development of this manual emphasized the need to gather follow-up information about these questions:

- **Are they employed?**
- **Have they gone on to further education or training?**
- **Are they employed in their field of training?**
- **Trainee's ability to maintain job?**
- **Trainee's ability to advance in job?**
- **Are they satisfied with the outcome of the program?**
- **Opinions & recommendations for change?**

APPENDIX J

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

General Considerations

Program administrative processes are rarely the focus of formal program evaluation in community-based training programs. The point of this Appendix is to raise awareness of the potential need for considering program administration along with other program features when planning a program evaluation.

Program administration is a key feature of the organizational context of community-based programs. This is particularly so when community agencies team with community colleges or other training partners to deliver services.

Administrative matters occupy a lot of time. Program staff have to be hired. Equipment, materials and facilities have to be acquired and maintained. Paperwork and records have to be in order. Program finances have to be taken care of. Communications and relations with government agencies, training partners and other organizations have to be maintained. Students have to be registered and certificates granted upon completion.

When administrative processes run inefficiently or break down, the quality and effectiveness of training programs is jeapordized. Time that could be devoted to improving program delivery can easily get diverted into dealing with administrative matters. Program administration is fair game for program evaluation.

Administrative processes may not have to be evaluated every go around of program evaluation. The need for evaluation of program administration will be greatest when innovative programs involving new types of administrative arrangements are first put into place, such as joint programs between community agencies and community colleges. Changes in administrative arrangements brought about by new requirements from funders may also create a need for evaluation of program administration.

Staff may already be aware that some part of the administrative process is not working well, such as disbursement of training allowances, participant registration, or communication among staff. In such cases it is reasonable to think of ways to systematically evaluate what the problem is, or to evaluate whether the problem is resolved by changes in current administrative practices.

Methods of Evaluating Program Administration

We do not have a specific method of evaluation to recommend. Any of the instruments described in Section III (questionnaires, interviews, logs, etc.) could be used to supplement the largely informal practice of staff discussion that currently prevails.

What to look at?

Whether they evaluate them or not, community-based program staff and their training partners do voice concerns about the effectiveness and effects of administrative processes on their programs. Table 32 summarizes the kinds of concerns expressed in interviews and in an evaluation workshop with community-based training program personnel. The list is offered as a framework to stimulate consideration of the need for evaluation of program administration as a part of program evaluation.

TABLE 32

AREAS FOR EVALUATION OF PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

PROGRAM STRUCTURE
- number of trainees
- length
- training component need (e.g., work placements)

PROGRAM FINANCES
- projected expenditures
- actual expenditures
- funding sources
- start-up cossts
- transactions (e.g., disbursal of training allowances)

TRAINING COST RATIOS
- per trainee enrolled
- per trainee graduated
- per positive outcome (e.g., job placement, enrolled in further education)

STAFFING
- selection
- job descriptions
- supervision
- workloads
- constraints of part time staff

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
- bookkeeping system
- program records system

COMMUNICATIONS
- among agency program staff
- w/ training partner staff

STUDENT DOCUMENTATION
- registration
- attendance
- completion
- certification

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL TIES
- w/ government sponsors & funders
- w/ training partners
- w/ social service agencies
- allocation of responsibilities
- delineation of linkages
- cooperation
- understanding of each other's policies

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PROCESS
- administrative support teachers/counselors
- staff development provisions
- program evaluation system
- flexibility for program change

ADVISORY COMMITTEES
- need for
- composition
- role/activities

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